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ABSTRACT

Letters and notes between grandchildren and grandparents can bring mutual benefits. This book shows grandparents how to start writing, what to write about, how to make writing fun and easy, how to get replies, and how to write memorable letters. The book, a sequel to "With Love, Grandma" (1998), provides sample letters on numerous topics for all ages. One of the issues it addresses is character development. The book's first few chapters seek to develop the traits crucial to gaining self-esteem and confidence. The book also covers citizenship. Following an introduction, the book is divided into these chapters: Writing Letters to Children; Growing Inside and Out; Letters Connect the Generations; Relating to Others; Becoming a Citizen; and Quick Ideas for Quick Letters. (NKA)

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ED 448 459

# Gotcha, Grandpa

## MORE Letters to Grandchildren

### by Carl B. Smith

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CREATURES

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# Gotcha, Grandpa

## by Carl B. Smith

### with Naomi Ritter

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication

&

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# Introduction

You may have noticed that bookstores feature few books on grandparenting. Those that do address the grandparents' role don't say much about how seniors can stay close to distant grandkids. Phone calls are usually too brief and fragmentary to develop much of a substantial relationship.

So, as a grandfather who has devoted a career to literacy concerns, I sensed a need here. Accordingly, a few years ago I started an organization, the Senior Partners Network, to help seniors relate to their grandkids with short but frequent letters. The Network has two aims: first, to foster the special grandparent relationship itself, and second, to enrich seniors' lives through the vital link of letters and electronic mail.

With the help of another organization, the Family Literacy Center, The Senior Partners Network (SPN) had a newsletter from 1994-2000, *THE WRITE PARTNER*. You are holding in your hands the cream of the crop from these newsletters: essays on topics relevant to seniors writing to a child, sample letters, and books recommended for sharing with the junior penpal. You will find here a wealth of information, resources and possibilities for networking.

Here are some further reasons for becoming penpals with your grandkids. The collective history of all our seniors is impressive: our generation conquered the Great Depression; it won the wars that helped spread democracy across the world. Our ideals and strengths led Tom Brokaw to title his recent book *THE GREATEST*

*GENERATION.* The same qualities he describes—loyalty, selflessness, bravery—also make you just the ones to give youngsters a needed sense of direction. Your steady letters, by mail or computer, will assert your loving presence as a powerful role model.

Think also of the mutual benefits these notes can bring. For the child, a letter is such a gift! You can probably recall how exciting it was to get your first personal mail. Children often save letters as a sign of their own importance. A letter means you are thinking of the child, you took the time to write, and you hope for a reply. He/she then feels significant enough to form a partnership with you. Sharing words bonds people, just as sharing food does.

Another benefit of writing is the subtle influence your notes can exert. Unlike parents and teachers, grandparents need not tell kids what they must and mustn't do. Instead you have the pure joy of freedom from any disciplinary role. Your letters can offer just the unconditional love that every child needs. Since grandchildren will always associate that perfect acceptance with grandparents, you may actually have a stronger influence on their character then you realize.

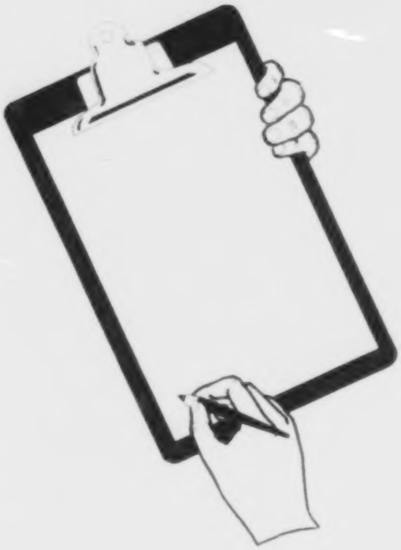
This sequel to *WITH LOVE, GRANDMA* (1998) addresses issues of character development. If you have become a senior penpal through the first volume, you have already established the writing connection. The themes in that first book concern the most obvious links between grandparents and grandkids; here we explore the deeper aspects of character that your letters can address.

The first few chapters develop the traits crucial to gaining self-esteem and confidence. Accordingly, your exchange of letters may help your grandkids set appropriate goals, feel enthusiastic about life, build identity, and persist at important tasks. These areas define crucial parts of a child's mental and moral growth. So do acquiring role models, making and keeping friends, and coping with adversity. Finally, the book covers citizenship. Your messages may encourage children's eagerness to participate in social and political communities. All these values lie at the root of success—in school, in careers, and in relationships.

So enjoy your penpal experience! It's sure to gratify both you and your grandchildren. Please tell us at the Family Learning Association about your experience; you may have valuable tips to offer other grandparents. At the back of the book you'll find information on reaching us by phone, FAX, snail mail, and e-mail.

—*Carl B. Smith*

# Writing Letters To Children



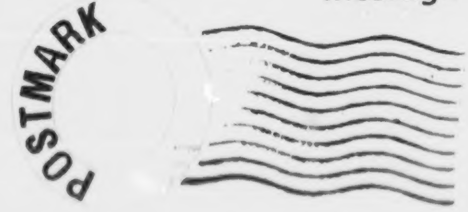
First of all, you don't need any special writing skills to become a good letter-writer. The most effective letters are brief, simple, and—most importantly—in your own voice. Sample notes throughout this book may help get you started. But after surveying the possibilities, you should find and develop your own tone, suited to your personality, life, and relationship to the child. The main point of writing is to remind juniors that you are thinking of them, you are interested in their learning, and you want to help however you can.

Seniors who write to their grandchildren say that once a month is a good frequency to start. As the ex-

change develops it may become more frequent. These note-writers also say brevity is the key to catching and keeping the child's attention. Remember that brief notes, if sent regularly, will convince children you care about their learning and their success in life. So keep your messages short, unless the child asks for longer ones.

Experienced Senior Partners also suggest getting the logistics out of the way early. Make sure to include an easy-to-read copy of your address when you begin corresponding with your junior partner. If you are using e-mail, your messages include your e-mail address. But you should also type it into your first messages, so your young person has a hard copy, just in case of a computer glitch.

Getting to the post office for stamps may also slow your partner's responses, so why not include a book of stamps in your introductory letter? This gift relays the message that you are serious about keeping in touch, and gives the child a sense of independence. The parents of the youngster will also appreciate your thoughtfulness.



## SENDING THE FIRST LETTER

Now let's get started! Here are some useful guidelines:

**1** Be yourself, but remember the age of your penpal. See the child development chart at the end of this chapter.

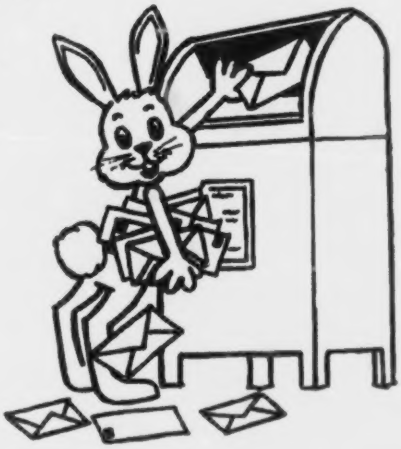
**2** Write simply and briefly, at least until you know about your junior partner's interests. The younger the child, the shorter your letters should be.

**3** Enjoy yourself. Tell jokes or personal stories.

**4** Subtly encourage learning. Praise curiosity as a long-term benefit. Show your own curiosity about the child's world. Show that you want to learn things together.

**5** Include pictures, news articles, information, even books. Respond to the questions your grandchild poses. The sooner you get an answer back, the more effective you will be.

**6** Be upbeat and positive, compliment the child whenever possible.



**Examples**

Children's ages naturally govern their view of the world, as does their experience. These sample letters try to reflect their evolving experience base, encouraging children to write responses that match their maturity. All these letters cover several important themes you can express repeatedly:

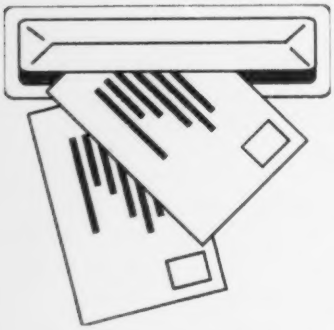
1. Care: *I care about you and your success.*

2. Encouragement: *Keep working now because it will pay off in school and later in life.*

3. Challenge: *Can you learn something new? Will you change your behavior to become better?*

4. Look to the future: *The future is your dream fulfillment.*

5. Remember the KISS principle when writing to children. That is, Keep It Simple!



# INTRODUCTORY LETTERS

## Ages 3–5

Snapshots of you and friends, your pets, your house, or surroundings make your life vivid for distant children. You may encourage an exchange of pictures by asking them to send their drawings of things they like.

> Dear Patsy,
>
> How do you like this picture of my bridge club? We are old friends. Every week we meet to play cards and chat. Do you do fun things with playmates? Please send me a drawing of you and some friends.

Cut out a cartoon from a newspaper and mail it with a simple note.

> Dear Will,
>
> I had to send you this funny cartoon. Does it make you laugh? I always like to see animals talking to each other. I'd love it if you could find a cartoon in your newspaper and send it to me.

This simple message tells your grandchild not only that you want to share enjoyable moments with him/her; it also says that reading a newspaper can be fun.

For new readers, picture postcards offer an automatic topic. You could send a postcard of your local library with the following note.

> Dear Carrie,
>
> I wish you could be with me at this library. We could share a magazine or a book and talk about it. Can you send me a postcard or a drawing of your library. I bet you have fun there.

With this message you share both interesting parts of your community life and an enthusiasm for reading.

## Ages 6–8

Theme: Let's learn more about each other through pictures. What interests are you developing? Challenge: write often.

> Dear Angelo,
>
> Won't it be fun to write letters to each other? Here's a recent picture of our house. Do you like it? I'd love to see you playing in the yard.
>
> Please tell me what you do after school: playing ball, swimming, visiting friends? I like sports, especially bicycling in good weather.
>
> Let's write letters at least once a month—maybe more often if we can!

Theme: Let's share learning.

Subtle messages: Reading is learning; I read a lot; you can learn through reading.

Dear Rita,

I've just finished reading the most interesting book! It's about kids winning at sports events. LITTLE WINNERS taught me about how kids feel about sports.

Please tell me what you are reading. Isn't it fun to learn from books? They take us into other worlds. If you read you are never bored, right?

## Ages 9–12

Theme: Learn from traveling.

Getting information is the first step. How can we use the Internet for our travel plans?

Dear Paul,

I've just come home from Detroit on an airplane. Do you like flying?

I booked my flight on the Internet, which was adventurous. But everything went just fine. Have you and your parents ever done that? Maybe you and Grandma and I could take a trip together this summer. If you tell me where you'd like to go, I'll send you some website addresses, so you can find out more about the place.

## Ages 13–16

Theme: The Arts enrich us.

Subtle Messages: Appreciating culture makes life more interesting. Learning to play an instrument, to sing, to paint, or to dance expands our awareness of art.

Dear Betty,

I know you love to paint, so please tell me about how you choose media and subject matter. My grandma used to do water colors, so we have her lovely pictures all over the house. Maybe hearing about your artwork would get her back into painting. Of course, we'd love to see any snapshots of your work.

I've been thinking I should get back to the piano too. Did you know I once played in a jazz band? My high school buddies and I weren't much good, but what we lacked in skill, we made up for in enthusiasm! I'll look for a picture of the band. You'll be surprised how young I looked in high school.

## HOW KIDS CHANGE AS THEY LEARN AND GROW

Figuring out how to relate to young people these days requires two parts knowledge, one part good sense, and a whole lot of luck! It is beneficial to stay within the child's range of experience and development. Though every young person matures at different ages, here are some general rules to keep in mind when writing.

In the early years (ages three to five), children love fantasy and fairy tales more than reading about how soccer is played. They enjoy using language and delight in chanting predictable phrases and rhymes.

No one ever gives up the pleasure of fantasy, but as six and seven year olds sort out the difference between fantasy and reality, they begin to understand the importance of their families and of significant people and events in their lives. Books about sleeping outside, pets, and friends interest kids of this age, especially if they can read by themselves. Eight- and nine-year-old children become increasingly interested in using books and writing as a source of information about real people and events.

By the time children reach the age of ten or eleven, they have a better understanding of historical time, and can project themselves into times and places they know were real. They enjoy learning about people who lived in the past and under social and governmental conditions different from their own. That's why biographies and historical fiction are popular with these kids.

Between twelve and fourteen, most kids tumble and scream their way into puberty. They become more interested in the opposite sex. Most kids' critical thinking skills are also taking a major leap forward: thus they can develop principles for judging people and situations. Kids of this age are generally very involved with and influenced by their peers.

Keep the chart on the next page for an easy reference summary of the changes kids go through as they get older. Knowing more about these changes in skills and interests will help you write more effectively to your penpal.

# HOW CHILDREN DEVELOP

| | Characteristics | Interests | Skills |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Ages 3–5** | Accept what is in books and on TV as real. | Enjoy magic and fantasy characters; like using language and word play. | Read pictures to help stories; easily memorize rhymes and predictable phrases. |
| **Ages 6–7** | Beginning to sort out fantasy and reality. | Enjoy stories about people and situations they can relate to. | Able to figure out the "code", so print carries meaning; memorize patterns and rely on previous experience with a book. |
| **Ages 8–9** | Understand the difference between fantasy and reality. | Interested in facts and information about real people and events. | Know how to read, but lack the stamina for long novels; need the support of pictures and familiar vocabulary. |
| **Ages 10–11** | Understand time and incident in terms of then and now. | Enjoy learning about real people and events that took place long ago. | Able to sequence events and mentally organize information so that it makes sense; able to project self into real time and places. |
| **Ages 12–14** | Relationships are important; developing principles by which to judge others. | Enjoy characters that share their own problems, concerns, and feelings. | Able to "feel" and empathize with others who are "going through the same things." Reading takes on a deeper meaning. |
| **Ages 15–16** | Becoming self-assertive, yet rely heavily on peer-group support. | Interested in exploring alternative life roles and values. | Can think about "what might be" or what is possible. Reading about abstract ideas leads to idealism for this age group. |

# Growing Inside and Out

## BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

Unfortunately, some children think so poorly of themselves that they cannot focus on their own strengths. Parents and teachers may have trouble dispelling the messages of inferiority that children absorb from their social environment. But grandparents can help to remedy this problem, as they occupy a unique position in the grandchild's life. Think of positive messages as one of your powers. Wouldn't it change the world if thousands of seniors looked for goodness or talent in youngsters? Your affirmation just might influence your grandchild to take more positive steps in their own lives.

Does it take a soothsayer to discover the talent in your grandchild? On the contrary, it just takes someone who will listen and offer praise. We need to listen for children's interests and their successes. In doing so, one detects their sense of accomplishment and the special energy they feel for certain activities. That's their talent trying to show itself.

When you spot that energy, praise the child for that activity. Ask him/her to let you know the next time he does some similar deed. Pay special attention to accomplishments in school, such as books read, assignments completed, even questions raised that explore new ideas. Encourage your penpal to feel pleasure in doing these things well. Your attention and your questions about these activities will highlight the child's competence and build self-confidence. All you have to do is reflect the goodness you see.

## Replying with praise and guidance

One writing senior tells how she dealt with a problem her granddaughter Nicole had at school. She had gotten a good grade in science, but she added that going to school was horrible now, due to a fight she had with another girl. She hated having to confront her. The reply

letter started by congratulating Nicole on the good grade, to reinforce her pride in accomplishment, then suggested she try smoothing over her problem with the other girl. "Life would be much easier in school," I wrote, "if you and your sparring partner could agree to live in peace.'"

"You do well in your studies," I said at the conclusion of my letter. "Make school a place where you gather with friends, not a place where you always fear your enemies."

"You were right," Nicole wrote back, "Since I made up with Jennifer, school is okay. Thanks."

The positive spark is there. All you need to do is help your grandchild find it.

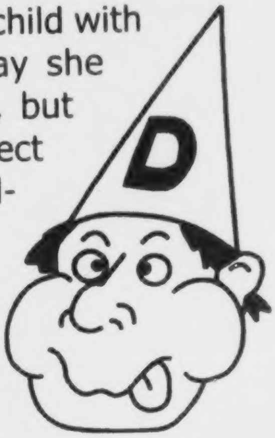
## Building Kids' Self-Esteem through Letters

*"The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward. Those who listen to us make us unfold and expand."* *—Karl Menninger*

If we practice active listening techniques in responding to grandchildren, we send a clear message: their thoughts are so important we must pay close attention to them. People who listen attentively and communicate carefully actually improve childrens' self-image. Listening in a way that builds self-confidence involves showing interest by asking questions. To open the way to further communication, ask questions the child cannot answer with a quick yes or no. If your penpal writes that Michael Jordan is his hero, ask him what Michael Jordan does that he likes. By incorporating his own words into your responses, you can give him confidence in his ability to communicate *and* let him know you value his ideas and opinions.

## Self-Esteem is a Feeling

Children's sense of their own worth is a collection of feelings. It grows from a combination of how they feel about themselves and how they perceive others feel about them. We usually tend to act out rather than talk about our level of self-esteem. For instance, a child with above-average intelligence may not say she thinks she is too stupid to learn math, but her persistently low scores in that subject reflect her lack of confidence and feelings of inferiority.



Many kids are unable to separate statements such as "I'm not very good at reading or math" from "I'm not very good." We can help by praising the child while admitting a poor performance in solving a math problem. Low self-image hinders children's school performance, which leads to poor self-esteem. When children feel this way, they get caught up in a cycle of academic failure like a merry-go-round. The child has increasing trouble jumping off such a merry-go-round as time passes: low self-esteem leads to failure, and each failure further undermines the sense of worth. Thus children experience a continuing pattern of failure and bad feelings about themselves.

Did you know that a child's self-esteem can be a more influential factor in academic success or failure than his/her level of intelligence? Researchers have shown the truth of this surprising fact. They developed tests that assess children's level of self-worth, and then gave these tests to a group of kids just entering school. Thirty months or so later, the researchers evaluated these children's reading skills and achievement scores. Those who had the highest levels of self-confidence in kindergarten also had the highest reading scores. As a result of these tests, California revised its educational goals. The revised goals designated increasing children's self-esteem as one of the major aims of education. California teachers defined this educational goal as the fourth most important one, placing it right behind reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Children often get special instruction in subjects that give them trouble, but they need just as much help developing their self-respect. You can offer your grandchild this critical help through your encouraging letters. The sample letters below exemplify phrases that boost self-respect. You may want to incorporate such phrases in your letters.

## Grandparents Say "I Think You're OK!"

Reverend Charlie Shedd has written a book titled *Then God Created Grandparents and It Was Very Good.* In the process of writing his book, Rev. Shedd asked young people to tell how their grandparents have changed their lives or influenced their thinking. Here are some testimonies he received:

One junior high student wrote: "When my father says, 'You are so dumb,' that makes me feel just terrible. So when I can, I go to see my grandmother and tell her about it. Then she says, 'I think what you did is not so good. But you're OK.' "

Another grandchild said: "At our house it seems like we are always putting everybody down. Sometimes I get tired of it. But my granddad says that everybody has a best side, and you will get along better if you try to see that."

A young musician wrote to Rev. Shedd: "What I like about my grandpa is how he keeps saying, 'I know you can make first chair. When some of those seniors graduate, you'll slip right in. Believe your old granddad, Jeannie! I can tell a good fiddle every time.' But here's the funny part. I'm not even playing the violin, I play viola. I haven't told him because I still like the way he says that."

## Building Confidence

Writing to grandkids provides lots of opportunities to say "I think you're OK," to build her self-confidence, and to bolster her optimism about her world. As we give to others, we also enrich our own lives. Listen to a grandpa explain how his own experience has reminded him of that important fact:

"After we retire it is important to keep in contact with people. I was getting stodgy, so I volunteered to run the registration desk at the Boy's Club. It really woke me up to kids and how they feel about things. I believe this will make me a better grandfather."

## Understanding Others

Self-esteem is crucial in the developing child, but equally important is understanding others and being open to different opinions. Knowing you are cultivating openness and understanding builds your own self-esteem. Part of understanding others is recognizing that people are trying to satisfy their own needs. Each person is different, yet worthy of respect. Each person is special in his/her own way. Being patient and caring will go a long way toward understanding and respecting others.

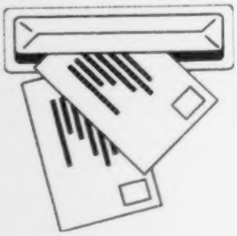
## How Writing Helps

Your letters to your grandchild will make you a role model to your penpal. Descriptions of your own experiences and how they helped you build self-esteem and a sense of identity can lead to good discussions between the two of you. For instance, you might write: "When I was a child, my parents always said that I was (lovable, strong, hard working, funny, etc.). Because of what they said, I think of myself as.... What compliments do people give you? And when they do, do you repeat the compliments to yourself? That helps to build inner strength.

## Guidelines for Building Self-Esteem

- **Accept your own thoughts and feelings.**
- **Accept strengths and weaknesses and learn to avoid putting "shoulds" on yourself.**
- **Set realistic goals.**
- **Love and respect yourself.**
- **Surround yourself with positive role models.**
- **Take time to be alone and spend time with yourself.**
- **Learn to accept and give compliments.**
- **Learn when and how to say No.**
- **Accept that it is okay to make mistakes.**

Source: SKILLS FOR LIFE.
Teacher's Resource Materials, 1992.



# LETTERS THAT BUILD CONFIDENCE

## Ages 3–5

Dear Bernice,

Here is a little book for you. You and Mom can read it together. The book shows how children work together to help a little old lady. I am sure that you are nice to people, too. What do you do to help people?

## Ages 6–8

Dear Charlie,

I'm sorry you got into trouble at school. It's hard sitting still so many hours, isn't it? I know you want to be out playing, as I did at your age.

But remember: doing something wrong doesn't mean you're a bad person. We all do bad things, but we mustn't let them get us down. The important thing is picking yourself up again and doing better the next time. That way both you and others will forget about a mistake you made along the way.

Please write and tell me if you feel better about yourself by now. I know you will in time!

## Ages 9–12

Dear Betty,

The other day I did something that made me feel just great: I volunteered at the Senior Citizens' Center. Helping the people there not only connected me with folks my own age and older, it also made me like myself for spending my time there.

Do you find ways to help people, so that you like yourself too? I think some people rarely think about others' problems, so they isolate themselves. Then they may have bad feelings about their own life.

Please let me know what you do that makes you feel like a good person, so we can share that feeling!

## Ages 13–16

Dear Hank,

I know how disappointed you are to have gotten a **C** in Math. You worked so hard on the problems!

It may be little consolation, but let me tell you about one of my own disappointments. You know I've always loved playing basketball, right? And I used to be pretty good at it. When I was 14 I played on a team that came oh-so-close to winning a tournament—we missed by just a few points.

Well, when my teammates and I got over the misery of having lost, I began to realize that the game had become too important to me. After all, I had plenty of other interests that wouldn't bring such grief! So I

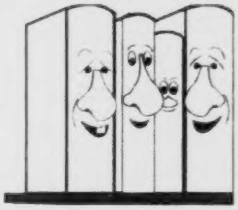
***(over)***

**Letter to Hank** **Page 2**

soon dropped the team, although I still played with friends. I didn't miss the competitions at all. And meanwhile I became a whiz in History. At least I did well enough at it to choose European History as my college major. I must have had an aptitude for the subject.

Maybe you can find your aptitude elsewhere too. I hate to see you suffer for something that may never gratify you. You're still playing piano, aren't you? Maybe music is a better bet for you.

Please tell me if these thoughts make any sense.



# BOOKS FOR BOOSTING SELF-ESTEEM

Children often read books or see a movie and decide they want to be exactly like a character in the story. It is easy for them to be swept away into the world that exists within the pages of a book, and to feel as if they are a part of that world. These books are full of positive role models and stories that strengthen self-esteem.

## For Ages 3–5

***SUNSHINE* by Jan Ormerod** (William Morrow, 1990) The sun wakes up a young girl, who then wakes up her daddy. She gets herself prepared for the day, and is the only one ready on time.

***I SEE* by Rachel Isadora** (Greenwillow, 1991) Shows pictures of the familiar objects in a young child's life, with easy sentences describing each page.

## For Ages 6–8

***THE LOVABLES* by Diane Loomans, Illustrated by Kim Howard** (Kramer, 1994) All the 24 creatures in this beautifully illustrated book have unique gifts that make them valuable. Helps kids feel confident and enthusiastic.

***THE WEDNESDAY SURPRISE* by Eve Bunting** (Houghton Mifflin, 1990) Anna and her grandmother have a surprise for Anna's father. They are creating a birthday present for him. Even though Anna is only seven, she is teaching her grandmother to read! They spring the surprise on the family at the birthday party.

***"EVEN IF I DID SOMETHING AWFUL?"* by Barbara Shook Hazen** (Simon and Schuster, 1992) A little girl breaks her mother's favorite vase. Her mother shows her that no matter how mad she gets or how awful something might seem, she will always love her daughter.

## For Ages 9–12

***FRECKLES* by Gene Stratton-Porter** (Indiana University Press, 1986) Freckles arrives with no real name or family. He longs to prove his worth and gain some respect from others. Through guarding the timber of the Limberlost, he finds courage, strength, love, and his beautiful Swamp Angel.

***GIRL TALK: STAYING STRONG, FEELING GOOD, STICKING TOGETHER* by Judith Harlan** (Walker and Co., 1997) Brimming with advice about dealing with girls' challenges, this book is the perfect companion for the teen years. Includes inspiring stories from women's history, and specific ideas for tasks to pursue.

## For Ages 13–16

***FLORENCE GRIFFITH JOYNER* by Nathan Aaseng** (Lerner, 1991) Discover Flo Jo's secret of success. Follow the life of this exceptional athlete from her youth to her Olympic victories in 1988. Charts her racing accomplishments and includes photographs.

# GOALS: WHERE ARE YOU HEADED?

As school starts each year, I get anxious about the future. I know a person's economic success depends heavily on education, yet our children seem less and less connected to learning that prepares them for the future. I know from Census Bureau data that almost 40 percent of current high school dropouts are unemployed. Our job market no longer accommodates unskilled people. Despite that fact, we haven't communicated to many of our young people that education is a critical condition for employment and their long-term economic value.

Though the problem is complex, we can help the young by turning their attention to their future. If they can imagine their lives to come, they can set goals to achieve what they imagine. If they see themselves as nurses, for example, they can understand the need to study sciences. Then they can see themselves in college after high school, as part of the journey they must take to reach their goal.

## Focus on Yourself

The major advantage of adults is experience. We have jobs or we have retired from jobs. If a person applied for that job today, what education, training, or experience would it require? To turn a child's attention to long-range goals, focus on yourself. The education it took to do your job is a good point of departure for asking children to think about their future. What will it take to become the person they want to be?

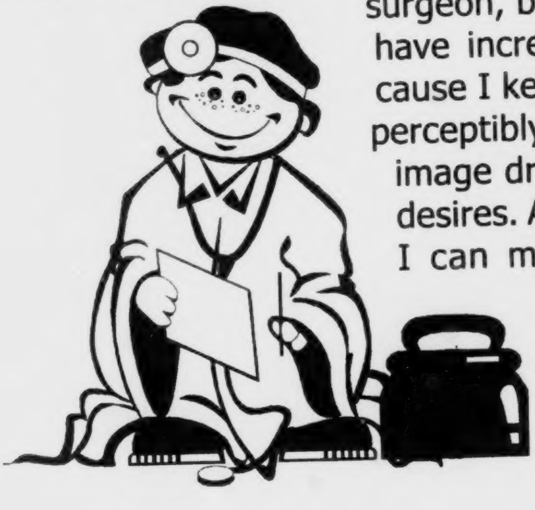
Young children often imagine themselves as doctors, nurses, firefighters, or police officers because those careers affect everyone's life. These jobholders are especially visible because they wear uniforms. As children gain experience, their career options expand, reflecting the people they know: sales clerks, tradespeople, teachers, bus drivers, and entertainers. What they usually don't know is the training it takes to get those jobs.

Don't hesitate to ask your writing partners what they would like to be when they grow up. Then you can ask them to picture themselves in that role (even though their picture may change next month), and to research what they will need in order to get that position.

## Goal-Setting and Expectations

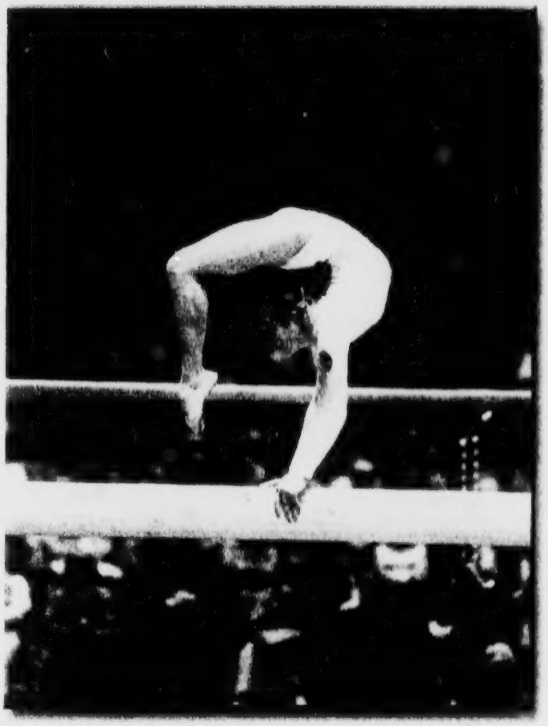
In the psychology of human behavior, one major guideline characterizes successful people: they establish goals as concretely as possible. The clearer the image of what you want to become, the more likely you are to achieve that goal.

If I can see myself as a first-rate surgeon and keep focusing on that image, I've pointed myself toward a target. That's no assurance of my actually becoming a surgeon, but the odds of success have increased significantly because I keep moving, almost imperceptibly, toward the powerful image driving my subconscious desires. And the more conscious I can make those goals, the more likely I will achieve them.



In letters to grandchildren you

can take advantage of that internal mechanism propelling us in the direction of clearly formed goals. All of us benefit from setting goals; but the people around us don't always discuss these aims. WE can remind our youngsters that we are conscious of goals, which may encourage them to set their own.



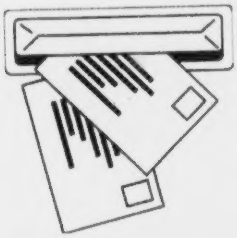
## An Immediate Challenge

The start of a school year offers a perfect opportunity to prompt children to answer this question:

What kind of person do I want to become?

Once you have some answers, try turning them into an immediate challenge: what can you do this year to move toward your goal? Learn more science; develop a caring attitude; improve my handwriting; increase my vocabulary; practice talking clearly.

By asking that simple question, you can bring the future into the present. Through your guidance, your grandchild can become more purposeful.



# LETTERS ON SETTING GOALS

## Ages 3–5

Dear Brian,

I hope you are learning a lot. As a farmer I study how to make my crops grow. What would you like to be when you grow up?

Will you cut a picture out of a magazine to show me what you want to be?

## Ages 6–8

Dear Nickie,

As the school year starts you must be learning many new things. What subjects do you like the most? We all must learn new things every day. That way we will be able to take care of ourselves.

Please send me a picture of the worker you want to be.

## Ages 9–12

Dear Laura,

When school starts each year, I wonder what I would learn if I were your age. Are there some special things that you would like to learn this year?

Computers are now used in almost every job. I would want to learn something new about computers each year. For example, I think learning how to use computers to find information in the library would be valuable for me.

The start of the school year reminds me that I want to be a better person—more kind or more helpful. Ever think about the kind of person you want to be?

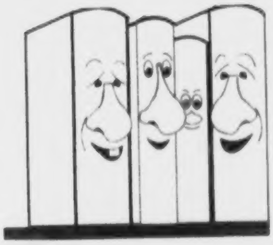
## Ages 13–16

Dear Amy,

With the start of school in the Fall, I wonder what my life would be like if I were your age. What would I be learning? What kind of life would I be planning? What would I be doing to make myself a better person?

Kids your age want to have fun, of course, but they also need to think about the direction their lives will take. The courses they take and other experiences they choose prepare them for adult life that is marching towards them.

How about you? Do you have an image of the life you will choose? What are your plans for this coming year?



# BOOKS ABOUT REACHING GOALS

When people read stories of success and accomplishment, they often sense the encouragement they need to meet their own goals. These books contain stories of children striving to reach a goal and learning a lot along the way.

## For Ages 3–5

***A CHAIR FOR MY MOTHER* by Vera B. Williams** (William Morrow, 1993) Rosa lives with her grandmother and her mother, who work very hard in a diner. After their house is ruined by fire, they all three save their extra change to buy a big, soft, beautiful chair.

## For Ages 6–8

***A GIFT FOR MAMA* by Donna Diamond** (Peter Smith, 1992) Sara works hard to earn money to purchase a special Mother's Day present.

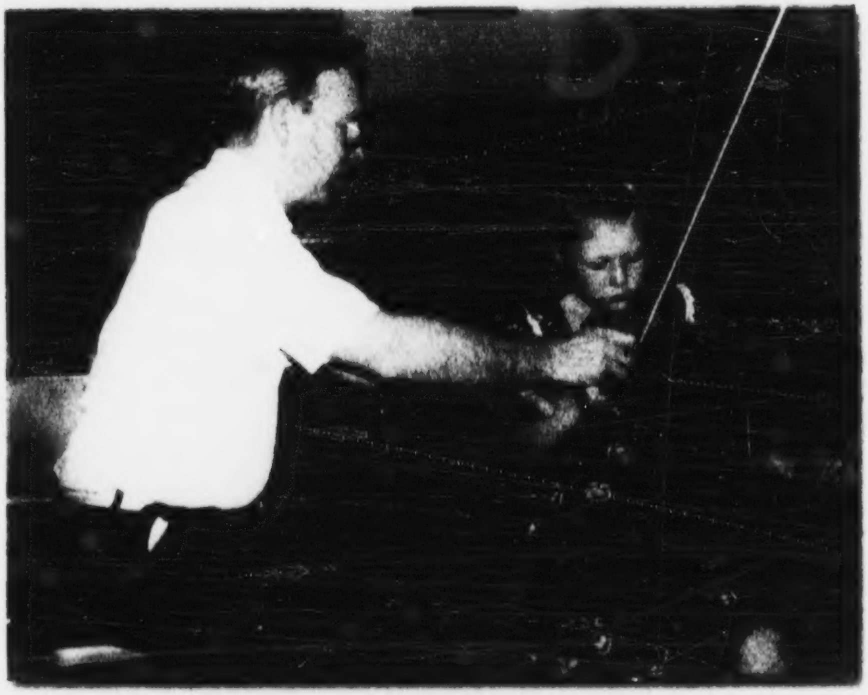
## For Ages 9–12

***THE LONG WINTER* by Laura Ingalls Wilder** (Scholastic, 1990) Native Americans had predicted correctly that the winter of 1880-81 would be one of the worst. The tiny prairie town where the Wilder family had moved for safety is completely cut off from the rest of the world by blizzards. With food supplies dwindling, young Almanzo Wilder and another boy make a dangerous trip across the prairie to obtain wheat.

***AN ORPHAN FOR NEBRASKA* by Charlene Joy Talbot** (Simon and Schuster, 1979) The story of a young Irish immigrant who arrives in America in 1872 and becomes the assistant to the editor of a small Nebraska newspaper.

## For Ages 13–16

***THE WESTING GAME* by Ellen Raskin** (Penguin, 1992) Sixteen hopeful heirs gather for a reading of the wealthy Samuel Westing's will, and learn they could become millionaires, depending on how they play a game. The game is intricate and even dangerous, and playing it takes the stalwart participants through a series of harrowing adventures in this book that won the 1979 Newbery Medal.



# ENTHUSIASM!

Suppose you are the manager of a department in a fairly large company, and you need to hire a new person to write and edit newsletters and flyers. You have reduced the pile of applicants to two people, both of whom look quite promising on paper. They both have education, training, and experience that you want for this job. All you have to do is interview them to see who gets the job.

Applicant "A" arrives well dressed and answers all your questions in a matter-of-fact manner. He doesn't smile during the interview (perhaps because he is nervous), and he doesn't volunteer information. He seems reserved and cool.

Applicant "B" arrives well dressed and begins by asking you about your association with the company and how you got to be the manager. During the interview, she shows she has done some homework, knows basic information about the company, and the department that you run. She scouted out data from other people in the company. Then she gave you reasons why she thought she had the skills and the personality to make your department a better place. She said she'd be excited to take on the job, giving you two ways she would improve the newsletter she saw on your waiting-room table.

Which of the two would you hire? That's almost a no-brainer, isn't it? Enthusiasm wins the race every time, all things being equal. We all want to be around enthusiastic people who show excitement for what they are doing. Wouldn't it be great if we could help our junior partners generate more enthusiasm about school and learning in general?

## From a Distance

Do you remember the song Bette Midler made famous—*From a Distance?* From a spaceship our earth looks peaceful, orderly, beautiful. But at ground level, it sometimes explodes with trouble, unhappiness, and chaos. If we never step back, or rise above the daily irritations of life, we can easily become depressed and discouraged. Looking at long-term goals, pointing ourselves in positive directions, we can progress along a more orderly path.

Our experience with school, work, and relationships shows us we can survive and thrive. Some of us rely on our family and community to give us that durability. Some of us see the far view through the eyes of our religious faith; some through altruism towards humanity. We see that, by focusing in the right direction and moving steadily toward our goal, we will get there eventually, though not without struggles, of course.

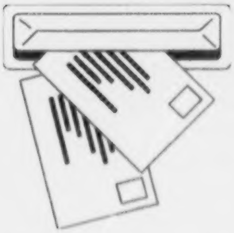
That message of optimism is extremely important to children. When we remind children they can learn, can do things well, can be good, kind people, we give them both goals and a sense of direction. Of course we cannot walk each step with them, but we can give them something more valuable than our physical presence on their journey. We can give them a personal sense that through school and their cooperative spirit, they will contribute to their community and learn to like themselves in the process. Isn't that a powerful legacy to leave your grandchildren?

## Where does enthusiasm come from?

Most of the time, enthusiasm does not come from the world around us. Most of the people around us tell us how hard life is, what a drag their day is, how boring their school or their jobs are. If we listen to them, our spirits will not rise; rather, they will sink. I asked three of my acquaintances where they found their enthusiasm. Here are their replies in a nutshell:

> "In my shower each morning, I tell myself that this will be a great day, that I will get a lot out of it. And then I do."
>
> "I start my day with a morning prayer: Thank you, Lord, for this day and its opportunities. Help me to use them well and to spread them to others."
>
> "I associate with enthusiastic people as much as I can. I want to be with people who are excited about their work or their lives because they then lift my spirit."

Indeed, enthusiasm is contagious. Because some people lift their own spirits, they raise the level of enthusiasm in others. Enthusiasm gives people energy to set and achieve goals. It is an essential part of any success.



# LETTERS TO GENERATE ENTHUSIASM

## Ages 3–5

Children at this age have a natural enthusiasm and curiosity. They love learning and sharing.

Dear Charlie,

I was watching a little boy build a house from blocks of wood. When he finished, he clapped his hands for himself and danced around his house. It made me feel good just to watch him.

Will you send me a picture of something you made?

## Ages 6–8

Kids this age, who are always interested in how things were "in the old days," enjoy hearing stories about what school was like forty or fifty years ago.

Dear Cindy,

You asked about what school was like for me. My favorite subject was History, which I liked because it showed me how much the world has changed. What's your favorite school subject? What do you like about it?

What do you do at recess in your school? When I went to school we played dodgeball during recess. Have you ever played that?

Here's a drawing of me that I made. My cat George is in the drawing with me. Will you send me a drawing of yourself with one of your friends in it—human or animal? I'll be watching my mailbox for your letter.

## For Ages 9–12

Kids in the middle grades feel challenged by adults who ask them to express opinions about the world. But acknowledging their blossoming independence will build a good foundation for future letter writing. Part of your role is to offer advice and share the benefits of experience with a youngster who needs encouragement. The trick is not to sound as if you are giving advice, or telling them what they should do.

Dear Mark,

I believe that if we show excitement for a project or a subject in school, we will profit from that enthusiasm.

It may not be cool to be enthusiastic about school, but without interest and energy, we usually go nowhere. Think of a basketball team that simply drifted up and down the floor. Would they win games? Probably not. Without hustle, they would be quickly overtaken by the opposing team.

What are your goals for this year? Do you want to make new friends, learn a new sport, or get an **A** in a certain subject? Enthusiasm will help you do any and all of those things. Who is the most enthusiastic person you know? What do you admire about that person?

Please keep me informed, and let me know if there is any way I can help.

## Ages 13–16

Letters to teenagers must acknowledge that they are on the brink of adulthood. Though they are still kids, they think of themselves as quite grown up. Some people even call them "young adults." Whatever opinions you have on the subject, your penpal will appreciate not being treated as a kid.

Much teen energy goes into sexual identity and the opposite sex. Teens also begin to pay more attention to the world outside their school and personal interests. Though they have very high energy during these years, they feel compelled to act as if most things in life are boring.

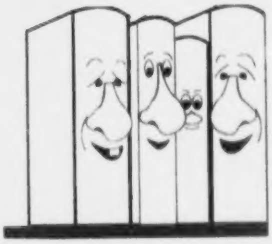
Dear Jeff,

You've been in school for years now. How do you keep your spirits high, so you can succeed? That's a major question for people throughout their lives.

I am always attracted to people who show enthusiasm for what they are doing, aren't you? Those are the people I want to work with and go out with.

One of my friends, Mary Montgomery, is one of those high-energy people I like. I asked her what kept her enthusiasm so high. She said: "How can I expect other people to be excited about my work if I am not excited? Each day I ask myself what is important to me today. Then I tell myself that I am really excited about that job. And then I am."

I hope you can talk to yourself that way. Won't you please share with me a project that excites you? I'd like to benefit from your enthusiasm.



# BOOKS ON ENTHUSIASM

## For Ages 3–5

***HONESTY AND POSITIVE THINKING* by Trenna Daniells.** (Trenna Productions audio cassette, 1985) An enthusiastic young girl and a pony teach children the invaluable lesson of positive thinking. By accepting and confronting her mistakes, Lily develops a hardy attitude to life's problems. Parents say kids listen to her story again and again.

## For Ages 6–8

***WONDERFUL NATURE, WONDERFUL YOU* by Karin Ireland.** (Dawn Publications, 1996) This colorful book explores nature as a great teacher. Its light touch helps to keep kids looking for wonders all around them. Also, in relating physical to human nature, the author shows readers how to "bloom where you're planted."

***OH, THE PLACES YOU'LL GO!* by Dr. Seuss.** (Random House, 1990) The title says it all for this classic Seussian adventure. Inspirational yet honest, full of the author's typical zany rhymes, the book makes a perfect sendoff for kids entering any new phase of life.

## For Ages 9–12

***THE KIDS' GUIDE TO SOCIAL ACTION: How to Solve the Social Problems You Choose and Turn Creative Thinking into Positive Action*** **by Barbara Lewis, Pamela Espeland, and Caryn Pernu.** (Free Spirit Publishers, 1998) Just the thing for the idealistic youngster who wants to make a difference. The book helps kids channel their enthusiasm for improving the community, offering sample letters to editors, ideas for interviews, speeches, surveys, activist networking, and many further resources.

## For Ages 13–16

***IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU: A Young Adult's Guide for Positive Living*** **by Thomas Barksdale**. (APU Publishing Group, 1998) In a conversational tone this book shows that a major part of coping with problems is keeping an optimistic outlook. From this empowering core value teens can develop just the responsibility, confidence, and self-respect they need for personal and professional success.

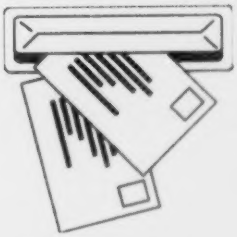
***ENTHUSIASM MAKES THE DIFFERENCE*** **by Norman Vincent Peale**. (Ballantine Books, 1996) For decades this classic book has counseled people of all ages. It describes the miracles enthusiasm can perform, overcoming the many anxieties we face in our world of constant challenges. Young people especially will appreciate the author's open, realistic approach to their problems.

# FINDING AN IDENTITY

A few years ago I saw a full-page message in the Wall Street Journal. The headline was: "*Will the Real You Stand Up?*" The United Technologies Corp. sponsored this public service reminder that we must think for ourselves. This message challenges us to speak up for our beliefs so we lift those around us to a higher level; it warned us of the danger of submitting to the pressures of our peers which can drag us down to the level of the crowd. "*Will the Real You Stand Up?*" reminded me of an expression I used to hear after World War II. It probably advertised French products, but all I remember is the repeated phrase: "Forty million Frenchmen can't be wrong." But in fact, forty million people following a dumb idea are only forty million dumb people.

One value of maturing is learning to appreciate the power of our own individuality, which allows us to follow our own beliefs. Instead of simply trailing along with a mindless crowd, we can then step back and see the bigger picture. For this reason we can readily help children rise above their daily crises, lift their spirits, and convince them they will become better persons in the future.

In the Fall, children start thinking about costumes for Halloween. What was your favorite costume? It is fun to dress up as a strange character. But it is also fun just to be yourself. Acknowledge the pleasures of masquerade, but encourage children to be themselves at the same time.



# LETTERS ON BEING YOURSELF

## Ages 3–5

Dear Joanne,

Are you going to any costume parties on Halloween? What's the strangest costume you have seen? Do you get a kick out of acting like a different person?

As a kid I once dressed up as an alligator! I thought I was pretty cool until I realized I had skinned my knees from crawling up and down cement steps.

Most of the time, I think, it's good just to be yourself.

## Ages 6–8

Dear Dave,

Did you ever read the story "The Ugly Duckling?" One reason I like it is that sometimes I feel like an ugly duck. After reading the book, I begin to feel better again. I realize that I am not ugly, just different sometimes.

Do you know books that make you feel better after reading them? I'd like to hear about the books that make you feel good. Perhaps you could share one of those books with me. I look forward to your letter.

## Ages 9–12

Dear Gary,

Thinking about Halloween brings back some very pleasant memories for me—like the parties my family had.

The parties were always held in our basement. It was unfinished: concrete block walls, not much heat, cobwebs. But my dad would bring in the corn stalks for decorations, and my mother would serve donuts and cider to my guests, and I thought it was great. My dad, a good storyteller, would tell a spooky story as part of the entertainment.

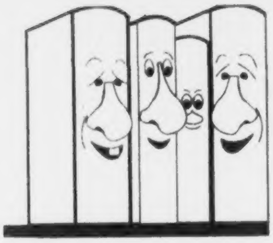
Do you think you and your friends would enjoy a Halloween party like that?

## Ages 13–16

Dear Travis,

One of my favorite authors is Gary Paulsen. He writes novels for young adults. Recently, I went to the library and got Paulsen's book called Dogsong. It is the story of an Eskimo youth who takes a dog sled into the frozen wilderness, to test himself and to see if he can find his own song—his own inner spirit. This story is exciting and moving.

Have you read any stories like that? Would you like to share your thoughts about them? I look forward to hearing from you.



# BOOKS THAT ENCOURAGE INDIVIDUALITY

Many people can remember reading a book that had a major influence on their life: a book that taught them a bit more about who they are and what they want to become. These books contain messages about what it means to be yourself, and how individuality makes the world more interesting.

## For Ages 3–5

***KITTEN FOR A DAY* by Ezra Jack Keats** (Simon and Schuster, 1994) A puppy joins his four kitten friends for a day of drinking milk and chasing mice. It is great fun for the puppy to pretend he is a kitten. He also learns to understand that kittens are not bad, but merely different.

***ALL I AM* by Eileen Roe** (Simon and Schuster, 1990) As readers journey through a day in the life of a young boy, they learn all the things he is and hopes to be. Concentrating on his identity, the boy expresses his hopes and dreams.

## For Ages 6–8

***MUGGIE MAGGIE* by Beverly Cleary** (Lectorum Publications, 1996) Maggie doesn't want to learn how to write in cursive, but prefers instead to keep her own style of writing. Maggie learns that uniqueness is a good quality, but that there are some things that everyone does the same way.

## For Ages 9–12

***ARE YOU THERE, GOD, IT'S ME, MARGARET* by Judy Blume** (Bantam, 1991) Margaret learns about herself as she experiences changes in her life. During her maturing stage she develops a relationship with God that allows her to understand herself better.

***PARK'S QUEST* by Katherine Paterson** (Puffin Books, 1989) Park sets out to find out about his father, who he believes died in the Vietnam war. However, when he arrives at his grandfather's home, Park is taunted by a young Vietnamese girl. Who is she? What lies in Park's family history? Park learns about himself and who he is.

***ISLAND OF THE BLUE DOLPHINS* by Scott O'Dell** (Scholastic, 1997) Karana and her little brother are stranded on a deserted island with a pack of wild dogs. Despite all her hardships, Karana survives the solitude by relying on herself. Based on a true story of survival.

## For Ages 13–16

***A DAY-BY-DAY RECORD OF 1985: THE YEAR YOU WERE BORN* by Jeanne Martinet** (William Morrow, 1992) Kids this age enjoy learning what was happening worldwide on the day of their birth. They will also see what their parents were experiencing during the first year of their life.

***A SEPARATE PEACE* by John Knowles** (Thorndike Press, 1994) Two friends learn about each other and themselves at a school during World War II. Phineas and Gene experience happiness, learning, and turmoil together. After a tragedy occurs in Phineas' life, Gene becomes what he perceived Phineas to be. Through this action Gene learns about both himself and the complexity of his friend.

# PERSISTENCE

## WHO ARE THE WINNERS?

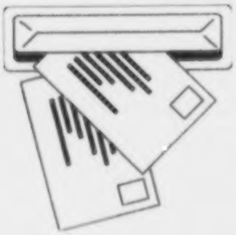
What do Larry Bird, Mother Teresa, Colonel Sanders, and many parents have in common? They are all winners, highly successful in what they did. Why? Think of the adage: "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." It reminds us of the power of persistence. That's what these well-known people have in common: they persisted in working on a good idea, whether in basketball, caring for the poor and sick, or selling fried chicken.

Colonel Sanders, the retired owner of a small country restaurant, knew he had a tasty recipe for fried chicken. He wanted to sell his recipe to other restaurants in exchange for a share of their profits. He drove from place to place, eventually contacting a thousand different restaurant owners before he got one to try his idea. The rest, as they say, is history. Colonel Sanders' Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) restaurants became a billion-dollar business because he was persistent.

Not all of us have ideas to make us millionaires; but we all have good ideas to make us successful people—if we simply have faith in our idea and persist in applying it. Ideas of hope, of caring, of exercising for health, of sharing information are all avenues of persistence.

Think about what happens if one saves money monthly and lets the interest accumulate in the account over many years. Fifty dollars a month at six percent interest for twenty years becomes $23,218, even though your contributions only add up to $12,000. Very few people have the discipline to persist in a savings plan like that, but it illustrates the value of doing little things for many years.

Some holidays give us a natural opportunity to share ideas about the power of persistence with our grandkids. In November we spend a day giving thanks for our blessings, a holiday that goes back to the early days of our nation. The Pilgrims, seeking the freedom to practice their religion, came to North America in 1621. During the first winter in what is now Massachusetts, many members of the group became ill and died. Those who survived did so because of their own persistence and the friendship of some Native Americans.



# LETTERS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

## Ages 6–8

Dear Virginia,

Did you ever wonder how star musicians and athletes become so great? It's called "practice." They often practice five to eight hours a day. That's a lot of time, isn't it? But that's what it takes to become a star or an expert. How about you? What are you practicing? I hope you are practicing your school subjects. They will help you more and more as you grow older.

## Ages 9–12

Dear Jacob,

Have you seen any good movies recently? I watch movies on TV or by using my VCR. Aren't they wonderful inventions? When I look at all the good things in my house, I thank my lucky stars. If I had lived 300 years ago, I would not have a heated house, running water, a stove, TV, radio, and hundreds of other things that make my life easier.

What would you say are the three or four things in your life that make you happiest?

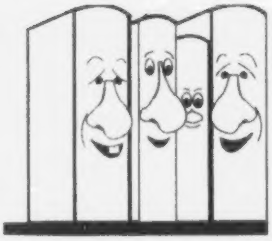
## Ages 13–16

Dear Amy,

Basketball player Larry Bird amazed everyone. He became famous and rich through sheer hard work. He didn't seem to have the natural talent that other players used to get to the top—speed, jumping ability, slam-dunk drives. Yet he played head-to-head with the best, and he outscored and outplayed almost all of them.

How? He just worked harder and longer in practice than anyone else. Larry Bird is only one example of dozens of people I know who succeed because they study and practice better than their friends. Do you know anyone like that? I'd appreciate it if you would describe that person. Then I would have another inspirational story to tell my friends.

Please write soon.



## BOOKS ABOUT TRYING

Children learning about the hardships the Pilgrims faced in settling this country may not readily understand what kept the Pilgrims going. Next Thanksgiving, why not suggest to your penpal that he/she read one of the following books? They will learn about persistence and helping others, which were so important on the first Thanksgiving.

### For Ages 3–5

***THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD* by Wally Piper** (Putnam, 1984) This is the classic tale of the train engine that uses the power of persistence to succeed. It teaches children they can do anything if they put their minds to it.

### For Ages 6–9

***THE GLORIOUS FLIGHT. ACROSS THE CHANNEL WITH LOUIS BLERIOT* by Alice and Martin Provensen** (Puffin Books, 1983) This beautiful "Picture Puffin," a Caldecott Award winner, tells the inspiring story of the man who devoted his fortune to building and flying the "Bleriot XI" across the channel in 1909.

***I AM ROSA PARKS* by Rosa Parks.** Illustrated by Wil Clay (Dial, 1997) Without her will to succeed, Rosa Parks could not have become the great symbol of the triumph of civil rights in our time.

## For Ages 9–12

***LEON'S STORY* by Leon Tillage** (Farrar Straus, 1997) The inspiring story of growing up as the son of sharecroppers, this book documents not only the absurdity of hatred and racism; it also shows how a courageous boy can work to make all people equal.

***CAESAR'S ANTLERS* by Brooks Hansen** (Farrar Straus, 1997) The reindeer Caesar needs perseverance to help a mother sparrow and her chicks find her mate. They make a nest in his antlers and—with the help of some magic—eventually find the missing sparrow.

## For Ages 13–16

***RACHEL CALOF'S STORY. JEWISH HOMESTEADER ON THE NORTHERN PLAINS* by Rachel Calof, ed. Sanford Rikoon** (Indiana University Press, 1995) This moving memoir chronicles an unusual Jewish immigrant experience: establishing a home in North Dakota at the turn of the century. The book is a profile in courage, highlighting determination, ingenuity, and faith in oneself.

***GENE STRATTON-PORTER. NATURALIST AND NOVELIST* (video) by Ann Eldridge and Nancy Carlson** (Indiana University Press, 1997) A stunning panorama of the life and work of this early twentieth-century novelist, whose books for young adults have never gone out of print. The Film Advisory Board, in giving this video its Award of Excellence, called it "a beautiful, inspiring story of a courageous conservationist."

# Letters Connect the Generations

## SENIORS AND JUNIORS TOGETHER

*Dr. Lee Salk, child psychologist and professor of pediatrics at the New York Hospital Cornell Medical Center was recognized as an authority on the family. Dr. Salk discussed the value of the extended family.*

## THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

While our children and youth constitute our greatest asset for the survival of our civilization, our greatest human resource is our older population. The wisdom, experience, and sensitivity of our older population about the problems of this life have been overshadowed by modern technology, and have served to weaken the importance of human relationships.

Nothing can ever replace human experience, and our older population can offer youth its benefits. If we lose touch with our past, our heritage, our roots, we will deprive our children of the opportunity to maintain contact with their humanness.

## Something Special to Offer

The belief that children and the elderly have little to offer each other, or that they are separated by vastly different interests, is totally erroneous. There is nothing more poignant than an exchange between a child and a grandparent or older person. The curiosity of a child concerning how things were a long time ago dovetails with the wisdom of an older person eager to transmit experiences, insights, and verbal pictures of what it was like "before you were born." It provides a stage upon which each is important to the other, where each gains a sense of self-esteem. To the child this exchange means going back in time to experience a sense of history; to the older person, it brings the attention, respect, and recognition of someone who can carry ideas forward to future generations.

We all need to feel important to others, to be significant in someone's life. To meet this need, children and seniors have something special to offer each other. A special language and understanding occurs when the curiosity of the young and the wisdom of the elderly work in tandem.

At age 11 my daughter Pia, now 14, chose my Aunt Muriel Drukker, who was 82 and living with us, as the subject of a biography for her social studies class. Armed with a tape recorder and a series of challenging questions, she isolated herself with Aunt Muriel when there would be no distractions.

A few of her questions: "When did you

first realize you were in love with your husband?" "How do you feel about the world today?" "Tell me about school. Did you like it?" "If you could go back in your life, how would you change it?"

This interview allowed each to learn about the other and to raise issues that gave insights into life today and yesterday. A verbatim transcription of the interview, together with old photographs provided by Aunt Muriel, led to the creation of a document that makes Pia Salk and Aunt Muriel proud. Aunt Muriel enjoys showing her friends this record of her life, her joys, and her woes.

## Everyone Needs to Feel Significant

Children often fail to interact in a meaningful way with older people because families are too busy to get together with grandparents, or because distances keep them separated. However, children can find much to appreciate in older people, many of whom have a fondness and special patience for youth.

Everyone needs to feel significant in the life of at least one person during early development. As a practicing psychologist, I cannot tell you how often I saw a young person survive overwhelming stress simply because of a grandparent who cared, understood, and showed love and acceptance.

(Source: *Old and Young, Generations at the Crossroads.* Testimony before House of Representatives Select Committee on Aging, Washington, DC, Sept. 8, 1982.)

# JUNIORS READ ABOUT ACTIVE SENIORS

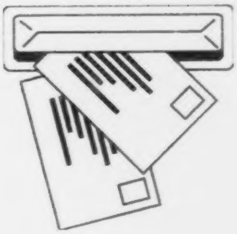
*by Barbara N. Kupetz*

*Associate Professor of Education,*
*Indiana University of Pennsylvania*

Not so long ago, it was common for grandparents to be a vital part of every family. Today, however, the gap between the generations, in most of the developed nations, has grown much wider. With increased mobility and the changed composition of today's families, fewer and fewer children have relationships with the elderly.

But we can use literature to narrow the distance between young and old. Just as we strive to select books that do not stereotype individuals by sex, race, social class, or ethnicity, we should also provide balanced and realistic portrayals of the elderly in literature. During the last few decades, more elderly characters have appeared in children's literature, and they have been portrayed more realistically. They are often protagonists, rather than peripheral characters. And we find more inter-generational relationships in current writing: young and old people talking, interacting, and solving problems together.

Today children read about much more than grandma baking cookies or grandpa playing checkers. They read books that realistically depict older people in nursing homes or suffering from Alzheimer's disease. And we can just as easily introduce children to active, vital older characters who attend dance classes, make snow angels, or write beautiful poetry—characters whose age has in no way diminished the fullness of their lives.



# LETTERS THAT UNITE THE GENERATIONS

## Ages 3–5

Dear Marty,

The other day I read a story about a girl named Coco. She lived on a hill on one side of town, and her Grandmother lived on the other side of town. They loved to visit each other. The story is about Coco and Grandmother trying to find each other, so they can have a picnic together. The book is COCO CAN'T WAIT.

Do you ever read stories about children visiting Grandmother or Grandfather? Will you send me the title or draw a picture for me?

## Ages 6–8

Dear Will,

A while ago I met a wonderful woman in her nineties, who told me about growing up in the early 1900s. Can you imagine horse-drawn trolleys? When she could afford the penny for the fare (rarely) , she would go across town (Boston) to the public library, which was her favorite place to spend Saturdays.

What would you like to know about that time? I've already asked her about how they did laundry—no washing machines! But I can ask her something that you are curious about too.

## Ages 9–12

Dear Terry,

When my father was a boy, he lived in the mountains of Kentucky. He had lots of stories to tell about those days. One was about his mother getting the fright of her life.

His mother took a kerosene lamp into the bedroom to get ready for bed one night. Just as she was about to crawl into bed, she noticed that the covers seemed to be moving. So she yelled, "Help!"

My dad and his brother ran into the bedroom. Their mother said, "There's something under the covers." Then she whipped back the covers. This time they all screamed and jumped back. There was a rattlesnake lying in the middle of the bed! The snake made a dash for a hole in the floor.

My dad said he was sure that as the snake reached the hole, he turned, smiled and said: "Sure gave you a scare, didn't I?" And he sure did!

Will you share a story with me that your Mom or Dad has told you?

## Ages 13–16

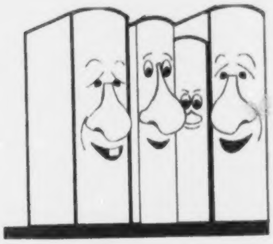
Dear Sally,

Did you ever think that legends are created in every age? These are stories that may start with an actual event, and then grow wilder as they are retold. Paul Bunyan and Davy Crockett are examples of American legends.

Families and neighborhoods sometimes develop their own legends. In my neighborhood there was a woman who could predict the future, they say. She told pregnant women whether they were going to have a boy or a girl. She told young people whom they were going to marry. She is said to have predicted deaths and all kinds of events.

Mrs. Crites became so dominant that many of us kids were afraid to think about any mischief in her presence. We were sure that she would know what we were thinking, and would announce our thoughts to our neighbors. Today we would probably call her a psychic. But we referred to her as "The Lady Who Knows Everything."

Do you have a family or neighborhood legend? If not, who is your favorite legendary figure?



# BOOKS ABOUT JUNIORS AND SENIORS

These books will delight children, as well as affirm the worth and dignity of each human being. In sharing and discussing such intergenerational literature, we help children avoid making assumptions based on stereotypes. Then they can see everyone—including the elderly—as they really are.

Celebrating a child's friendship with an older person, these books show how their special relationship nourishes both senior and child. Sharing these books and talking about them in your letters will encourage you and your grandchild to express why your relationship is so special.

You can send a book as a gift, or the two of you could agree on which book to read. Then you can both check it out of your local libraries.

## For Ages 3–5

***DEAR ANNIE* by Judith Casely** (William Morrow, 1994) "Grandpa is my penpal," Annie tells her classmates. It all started when she was born and Grandpa wrote her a letter to welcome her into the world. First, Annie's mother read her the letters and she dictated her answers. Now she reads and answers them herself.

***GRANDPA DOESN'T KNOW IT'S ME* by Donna Guthrie** (Human Services Press, 1986) The story of a family adjusting to Alzheimer's disease, this book will help kids understand and accommodate the inevitable changes in the adults they deal with.

## For Ages 6–8

***THROUGH GRANPA'S EYES* by Patricia MacLachlan** (Harper Collins, 1995) Although John's grandpa is blind, a special relationship develops when John discovers the preciousness of life and the beauty of nature through his grandfather's keenly honed senses.

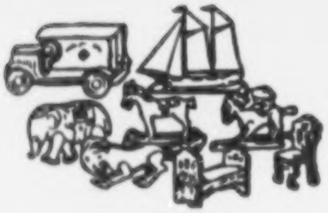
## For Ages 9–12

***SWEET MEMORIES STILL* by Natalie Kinsey-Warnock** (Cobblehill Books, 1997) Shelby's grandmother loses all her possessions in a fire, including photograph albums that Shelby cherished as part of her heritage. But she finds a way to keep those memories alive.

***OUT TO PASTURE* by Effie Wilder** (Peachtree Publishers, 1997) 2 audiocassettes, 180 minutes. This inspiring first novel by an 85-year-old resident of a retirement home tells us all how to live life to its fullest—regardless of one's age.

# THE WAY THINGS WERE

## HISTORY IN THE MAKING

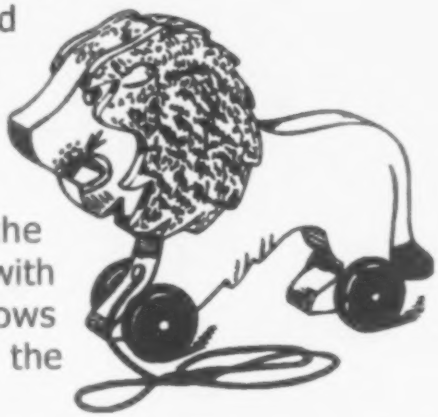


You are a work in progress. You are history in the making. No matter your age, you are writing history with each decision you make. This makes you intensely interesting.

Even more interesting, you bring to your life the genes and the history of your ancestors. The events of today are not isolated. They are surrounded by your parents, grandparents, and the experiences you have piled up in your memory. Some of those ancestors and histories may fascinate your junior partners. Some are interesting only to you.

Your penpals might like to hear about some of the special events from your life or the lives of your predecessors. More importantly, they would like you to show an interest in the events of their lives and histories. You can express your interest most naturally after you have written about something from your own background.

For instance, I used to hide in trees on a vacant lot near my boyhood home. Whether playing hide-and-seek games or hiding from a neighborhood bully, I loved to climb into the leafy branches of one of those trees. No one could find me there. I wrote about that hiding place to one of my junior partners, who then told me: "I hide in a place between our garage and the next one. I can read or play with my dolls there. No one knows that I am there." What are the



special hiding places of the young children that you write to?

Give your writing partners ideas on how they can collect the memories and the feelings of their grandparents and other older relatives or neighbors. Children usually want to know what life was like in the old days; they are curious about the differences between their lives and those of their grandparents or great-grandparents. My own children sat amazed when my father told them about his life in the hills of Kentucky during the early days of this century. His only transportation there was a mule.

Here are some questions that children could ask older relatives or friends:

★ **What's the best memory you have from your childhood?**

★ **Where did your parents or grandparents live when you were a child?**

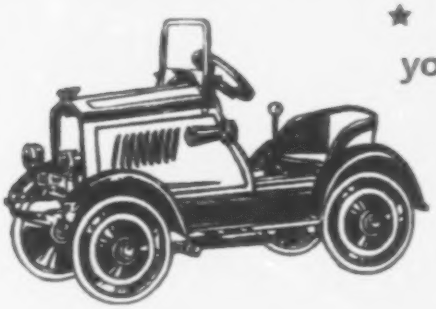
★ **What was the scariest thing that happened to you as a child?**

★ **How did you meet grandpa or grandma?**

★ **What's the most interesting place you've been?**

★ **Who is the funniest person you have known?**

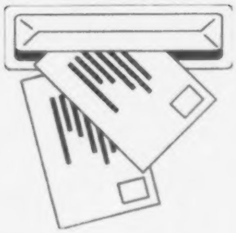
★ **Will you write the best thing that you remember about me?**



These questions can stimulate older people to tell stories. It would be great fun for kids to get older friends to write some answers. That way the child can reread and share them directly with others—you, for example.

Questioning grandparents and older friends is a good way to learn information about the past. It enables children to sense some of their own family history: not just the boring dates of birth and death, but the memorable events and feelings that older relatives can share. We are all intrigued by our roots, even young children. If children can get personal tidbits from the past, they can fill in more details as their curiosity and opportunity allow.

Exploring the memories of their elders may give our junior partners some sparkling stories to write us. In their own personal development, children will begin to feel like part of a history they are still making.



# LETTERS
# SHARING THE PAST

## Ages 3–5

Dear Bobby,

Here's a picture of my grandmother as a young woman. Do you think she looks funny in that long dress?

In the early 1900s women always dressed that way. But have you ever seen Mom in a long dress?

I would love to have one of your drawings—of Mom or whatever else you're looking at.

## Ages 6–8

Dear Ramona,

Last night Grandad and I got talking about the time when your Mom was your age. We had such fun that I thought I'd tell you a couple of details.

When your Mom was about 7 she had never had a haircut. Can you imagine? So every morning I put her long hair into thick braids. She would get impatient, and so would I, but we loved the way she looked.

Do you know anyone with hair down to her waist? I don't think girls like that style any more, but maybe you know of some who do.

Please write!

## Ages 9–12

Dear Mary,

Since you like history in school, I thought you'd like to see a true document of the past. I'm enclosing my ration book from World War II, so you can see what that war meant to people my age.

Of course we always had enough to eat, but meat was in short supply. Luckily my mother was an inventive cook, so we hardly missed the steaks and chops. In Britain the rationing was much worse; people there considered an orange the utmost luxury! We had friends in London, and tried to send them a package of fresh fruit. But the post office couldn't take it. I guess the mail was rationed too.

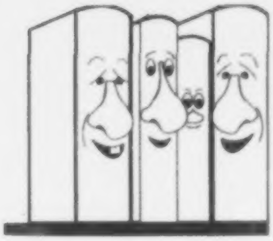
What would you miss the most if we had rationing again?

## Ages 13–16

Dear Andre,

Your letter about collecting comic books made me think of my crazy cousin (doesn't every family have a crazy cousin?) who collected clocks. Pete collected antique clocks, which he displayed all over his house. However, he didn't set them at the same time. Instead, he set them to ring or chime at different times, so he could count them, to make sure they were all still there!

What do you do with your comics collection? Maybe you could start a lending library for other kids. Collections can tell us so much about history and culture!



# BOOKS ABOUT PERSONAL HISTORIES

## For Ages 3–5

***DINOSAUR'S HALLOWEEN* by Liza Donnelly** (Scholastic, 1988) An encounter with a fellow trick-or-treater, whose dinosaur costume is remarkably realistic, gives a boy a Halloween full of surprises.

***GORGONZOLA'S REVENGE* by Karen Wallace** (Barron's, 1996) Gorgonzola, a ghost mouse, is over a hundred years old, shiny and silvery as a teaspoon. She is also the head of her family, so all the other ghost mice look up to her. She believes ghosts should have a keen sense of their own history; ghost mice are no exception.

***THE WOODEN DOLL* by Susan Bonners** (Lothrop, Lee, 1991) Visiting her grandparents, Stephanie learns the origins of Grandpa's beautiful wooden doll.

## For Ages 6–8

***MY GRANDMOTHER'S JOURNEY* by John Cech**, (Simon and Schuster, 1988) A grandmother tells the story of her eventful life in early 20th century Europe and her arrival in the U.S. after World War II. The story is based on the life of Feodosia Ivanova Belevtsov, born in pre-revolutionary Russia in 1907, survivor of the Russian Revolution, years of civil war, the Stalin purges, the famines of the 1930s, and capture by the Nazis.

## For Ages 9–12

***MY BACKGROUND HISTORY BOOK* by David Weitzman** (Little Brown, 1975) This book shows how to collect and preserve the present for fun in the future. The past lies all around us, from attics to old recipes to cemeteries to memories of relatives, and the book recommends "draw it, photograph it, write it down, sing it."

## For Ages 12 and up

***THE KING'S SHADOW* by Elizabeth Alder** (Farrar Straus, 1995) This winner of four "Best Book" awards tells of Evyn, son of a Welsh serf, who dreams of becoming a minstrel storyteller. Dramatic accidents bring him a different fate: as squire to the last Saxon king, he participates in the Battle of Hastings.

***A SEPARATE BATTLE. WOMEN AND THE CIVIL WAR* by Ina Chang** (Puffin Books, 1996) Deemed "a notable book" by the American Library Association, this book chronicles the lives of people neglected in history texts: women abolitionists, spies, and soldiers. Reveals how brave women influenced the course of the war, and in doing so, transformed their own lives.

# Relating to Others

## IDEAL PEOPLE = HEROES

Do you have personal heroes—people whose image stands tall in your imagination and somehow guides your behavior? Can you name them? I think most of us would go out of our way to see some entertainers. For me there have been many, ranging from folk singer Harry Chapin, to basketball star Michael Jordan, to comedian Bill Cosby, to the thrilling tenor Placido Domingo. But as famous as they are, entertainers seldom influence my attitudes, my work, my spirituality, or the way I love.

**Finding Inspiration**

Many famous people have inspired me one way or another. As a kid, for instance, I loved to watch baseball, to listen to the Cincinnati Reds game on the radio, to play the game endlessly. So one of my heroes at that time was baseball legend Ty Cobb. Though he had already retired, his batting averages and stolen bases were records for everyone to shoot for. I wanted to know everything about him, including the way he thought, so I could imitate him and perhaps even surpass him.

Needless to say, I never became a famous ballplayer, and so did not threaten Ty Cobb's records. But he definitely influenced my young life.

In elementary school, I heard a story about St. Francis of Assisi. It seems he saw a wooly worm trying to cross a busy road, where a passersby would surely crush the worm. St. Francis picked it up and placed it in the grass on the side of the road, saying, "There, Little Brother, you are safe for now." That story led me to read more about St. Francis, and his example increased my respect for all living creatures.

Over the years, I have admired and imitated all sorts of people: some famous, such as Thomas Jefferson, with his inventive mind; some not famous, like my father, who taught me persistence and hard work; some friends, like the college roommate who showed me how to meet challenges with optimism.

## Discussing Heroes with Kids

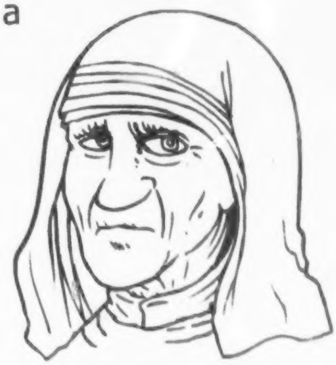
Kids today are no different from us in this respect; they have heroes too. Write to them about a few of your heroes. Ask them to tell you about one of their heroes and to describe what they admire about that person.

Personal heroes are opportunities for continuing messages between you and your grandchild. With any hero you can explore such things as education, work ethic, or respect for fellow humans. Thomas Jefferson studied classic philosophy. Larry Bird practiced more than his fellow players.

Itzhak Perlman, crippled by polio, plays his violin concerts seated. Cesar Chavez fought for humane treatment of migrant workers. You and your grandchild can discuss heroes, the reasons they appeal to you, and exchange many important letters on the topic.

According to a recent survey by the Girl Scouts of America, kids today most admire actors and actresses, popular musicians, and athletes. The three famous people most admired by youngsters of all races were Bill Cosby, Eddie Murphy, and Michael Jordan.

A hero leads us by representing an idea or an image that can inspire us to become better than we are now. Heroes stand for a skill, a virtue, or a character strength that makes us perk up and say: "I want to act like that person." When people challenge children to find heroes to imitate, they can begin to separate the media stars from the people who change the world around them.



Teenagers have a bit more perspective on whom to consider examples worth admiring and emulating. The top three choices of teens in a survey conducted for the *WHOLE EARTH REVIEW* were family members and friends, no one, and Mahatma Gandhi.

We all feel inspired and encouraged by people like Mother Teresa, who devote their lives to lessening the suffering of others; people like Martin Luther King, Jr., who tirelessly campaigned for social justice, or successful business people who create ways to improve the quality of life.

Who were your heroes? Who are your heroes now? What traits in that person made you want to resemble him or her? How did their qualities, values, or accomplishments influence you?

Find out whom your grandchild considers a hero. What does he or she find admirable about that person? Asking these questions and sharing your answers will give you the opportunity to discuss what it means to have good examples to follow.

## The Special Adults in Children's Lives

95% Parent

65% Extended Family

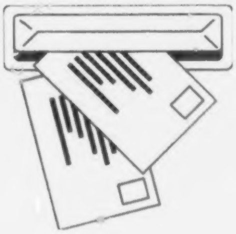
42% Teacher or Coach

30% Neighbor

22% Minister or Rabbi

19% Counselor or Social Worker

Adapted from the Girl Scouts' *SURVEY ON THE BELIEFS AND MORAL VALUES OF AMERICA'S CHILDREN* (Source: Memit, Susan. "Kids Today." *INSTRUCTOR*, Sept. 1990, 35-43)



# LETTERS ON ADMIRABLE PEOPLE

## Ages 3–5

Dear Susan,

When I was little, I thought ______________ was the smartest, strongest, most wonderful person in the world. I wanted to grow up to be just like him/her.

Whom do you want to resemble when you grow up? What do you like about that person? Send me a picture of your hero, so I can see what he/she looks like.

I love reading your letters. And your last drawing hangs on my refrigerator too.

## Ages 6–8

Dear Andy,

What do you think it means to have a hero? What is a hero? Do you have any heroes?

When I was your age, my hero was ______. I wanted to be (a good baseball player, an agile gymnast, a kind teacher) just as s/he was. My hero influenced me to_________.

Please write and tell me what your hero makes you want to do or be.

## Ages 9–12

Dear Jonathan,

I like to learn about (inventors, famous women, explorers etc.). Which famous people from history do you most like learning about?

Does your school library have any books about ____________ ? If you find one, please read it and tell me what you have learned. Are there any famous people from history whom you want to resemble? What do you like about him or her?

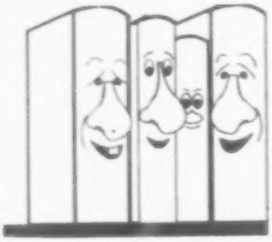
I hope you write back soon.

## Ages 13–16

Dear Bert,

When I was walking in the park, I saw one boy push another to the ground, which made him cry. A girl came up and brushed off the dirt. She talked to the boy until he stopped crying. When they went to play, they both were smiling.

When you were hurt or feeling bad, was anyone kind to you, making you feel better? I hope so. I am sure you are kind to others, too.



# BOOKS ABOUT HEROES

Talking about people you admire might inspire you and your grandchild to read and share some books about famous people. You can find a few of these books at your local library. If your grandchild doesn't have a library card, encourage him/her to get one.

## For Ages 3–5

***WILL AND ORV* by Walter A. Schulz** (Lerner Publishing, 1991) Johnny Moore, the young friend and helper of Wilbur and Orville Wright, tells the story of their historic 12-second flight from his own eyewitness perspective.

## For Ages 6–8

Author David A. Adler uses simple words and colorful pictures to tell about the lives of famous people. He has written and illustrated picture book biographies of *Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, Eleanor Roosevelt, Jackie Robinson, Lou Gehrig, George Washington, Anne Frank, Martin Luther King, Jr., Harriet Tubman*, and others. (Holiday House)

## For Ages 9–12

***THE FAMILY UNDER THE BRIDGE* by Natalie Carlson** (Harper Trophy, 1989) Old Armand, a Parisian hobo, enjoys his solitary, carefree life until a homeless mother and her three children claim his shelter under the bridge. Readers learn how a hero learns to share his blessings, however meagre, and thereby enriches his own life. A Newbery Honor winner, this book has been much praised for its warmth and humor.

***BLACK ELK: A MAN WITH A VISION* by Carol Greene** (Children's Press, 1992) This colorful picture book tells the story of Black Elk's vision of the whole earth living in peace.

***GO FREE OR DIE: A STORY ABOUT HARRIET TUBMAN* by Jeri Ferris** (Carolroda Books, 1990) Tubman's willingness to risk everything she had to help others will encourage young readers to wonder at the mystery of her strength and, with a little guidance, to look inside themselves.

## For Ages 13–16

***BRIAN'S WINTER* by Gary Paulsen** (Bantam, 1998) This is the sequel to the Newbery award-winning *HATCHET*, about 13-year-old Brian's ability to survive alone in the Canadian wilderness with only a hatchet. Brian builds on his survival skills to face the utmost Northern winter.

***SOUNDER* by William Armstrong** (Harper Trophy, 1972) A landmark in children's literature, a Newbery Medal winner, and an acclaimed film, this story shows how a poor nineteenth-century African-American boy manages to rise above the miseries of his life.

# PEOPLE WE KNOW

## HOW TO MAKE AND KEEP FRIENDS

*by Naomi Ritter*

Most children are eager to make new friends. Those without siblings or those transplanted to a new location may have special trouble finding friends. Children need to develop certain kid-friendly attitudes in both these situations, when they most need to feel welcome and appreciated.

Grandparents can ease the problems a child encounters in befriending other kids or maintaining friendships. First of all, listen carefully to what your penpal may tell you about his/her problems with other kids. Once you understand the situation from the child's perspective, you may be able to offer valuable advice. Of course your own experience with friends can supply helpful examples.

### How Can Kids Connect With Other Kids?

Often the first thing children talk about with each other is shared situations. When my eight-year-old son started at a new school in a new town, he first sought out other new kids, so they could commiserate about being outsiders. He also did some market research on who else had divorced parents, as that was his new condition. With both topics he made contact with others; one classmate became an actual friend.

Grandparents can encourage kids to be outgoing. Your wisdom and experience can suggest ways for a child to befriend others without being pushy. Inviting someone over to see a new video game or play with a pet might work. Offering to exchange books—even comic books—is also a natural way to get acquainted.

Once children feel comfortable in a new environment, they'll look for kids who share their interests. Whether it's a sport, a school subject, computers, or a hobby, you can suggest that your grandchild let others know what fun it is to get involved in these things. In that way the child will come across as an interesting, positive friend to have.

## Why Do We Lose Friends?

Kids are like the rest of us: sometimes they say or do things that alienate others. The school or neighborhood environment often seems to foster competition—an inevitable fact that kids must learn to manage. When children compete for turf, other kids' friendship, or simply things they all want, they need some negotiating skills.

Here again, a senior's loving advice can help solve such puzzling problems. You have probably experienced similar dilemmas, and can accordingly suggest ways to resolve conflict and preserve friendships. Kids can and do learn to listen to others with empathy, which may happen most readily through models. Even if no one in your grandchild's circle is a good role model, your letters can almost embody such a model.

## Great Friendships

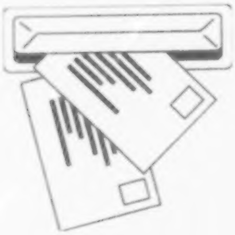
Exemplary stories of friendship's enormous value seem embedded in most cultures. Children often absorb this message through their favorite tales of animal friends. How can kids grow up without E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*? Its ending moral has stuck forever in my memory: "It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer. Charlotte was both." This gem of White's understated wisdom and humor may impress a child with the love that a friend like Charlotte can create.

Of course the literature of friendship provides many other examples. If your youngster enjoys history and mythology, explore the legendary Greeks Damon and Pythias. Their story of a man's offering his life for his endangered friend tells how heroic friendship can be. Not only did both men survive; but their example also inspired their ruler, Dionysus of Syracuse, to ask for inclusion in their friendship.

This evaluation of the relationship by psychologist Timothy Hartshorne sums it up well:

> *"Having friends seems to make a difference in people's lives. It may foster self-esteem, mental health, social competence, and inhibit loneliness... Perhaps the most basic contribution of friendship is a sense of belonging. Through the experience of intimacy, companionship, and social support, people come to feel valued as human beings. They feel that their partnership in these relations has meaning for both themselves and their friends; they feel indeed part of a community; in other words, they belong."*

(Source: *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR*, v. 2 (Academic Press, 1994)



# LETTERS ABOUT FRIENDSHIP

## Ages 3–5

Dear Mimi,

I'm so glad you told me about your new house. Your room sounds lovely! But please don't worry about finding playmates. I'm sure that Mom and you will do some visiting in the neighborhood, and the families nearby will have kids eager to know you.

Please send me more drawings of the new house. And maybe you will be sending me some pictures of your new friends too!

## Ages 6–8

Dear Jimmy,

I'm sorry you're feeling sad about that fight with Tom. We all get into arguments with our friends, but when we really care about each other we work out the problem. Do you think calling Tom to patch things up might work? I bet he's feeling sad about you too, so your call might be just the thing to make you both feel better.

Please keep me posted on what you decide to do. I know how precious a friend can be.

## Ages 9–12

Dear Sara,

Moving at this time of year must be tough for you. Anytime you move, you must adjust to new places and people. On the positive side, you might meet new and exciting people. And sooner or later you'll find people who become truly good friends. Then you'll be glad you moved.

You certainly are not alone in finding new friends when you move. Did you know that the average family moves every five years? Since I have become an adult, I have moved 13 times. Several of those moves took me to a new city. So I have actually moved more often than the average family.

If you treat your new acquaintances in a friendly way, I am sure you will soon find new friends just as good as those in the old neighborhood. Please write to let me know how everything is going.

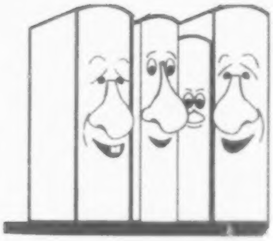
P.S. This may be a good time to read a book about someone who moves to a new neighborhood. Talk to your librarian. If you find a good book, let me know. I'll read it, too, and we can share ideas about the book.

## Ages 13–16

Dear Molly,

I've been thinking a lot about your last letter, especially the news that Barb has moved to Arizona. Wow, you must miss her; haven't you been together since grade school? I remember how lost I felt when I was 12 and my best friend's father was transferred to Europe.

We wrote letters of course, but it wasn't the same. At least you can talk to Barb on the phone, and maybe visit each other on vacations. Please let me know how you plan to stay close to each other.



# BOOKS ABOUT GOOD FRIENDS

## For Ages 3–5

***FRIENDS* by Helme Heine** (Simon and Schuster, 1997) This colorful book follows the lives and close friendships of farm animals. Together they conquer the village pond and find a way to pick cherries from a tree.

***WANTED: BEST FRIEND* by A.M. Monson** (Dial Books, 1997) This humorous tale of the give-and-take of friendship features Cat, Mouse, and a variety of oddball characters sure to appeal to young imaginations.

## For Ages 6–8

***WILL I HAVE A FRIEND?* by M. Cohen** (Simon and Schuster, 1989) Jim worries about finding a friend at school, but soon Paul shares his toy truck with him. Presto: Jim has a friend. Perfect for those first days at a new school.

***ARE YOU MY FRIEND?* by Janice Derby** (Herald Press, 1993) This story explores the wealth of opportunities found when we make friends with diverse kinds of people.

***MY BEST FRIEND MOVED AWAY* by Joy Zelonsky** (Raintree Steck-Vaughn, 1992) Brian learns how to accept change—and find new friends—when Nick moves away.

***EAGLE SONG* by Joseph Bruchac** (Dial Books, 1997) Danny Bigtree, missing the Mohawk reservation where he used to live, has trouble making friends in his new school, where the kids call him "Chief." His story shows how to take pride in one's identity, yet reach out to those who are different.

## For Ages 9–12

***CHARLOTTE'S WEB* by E.B. White** (Harper Collins, 1952) Wilbur, Fern Arable's pig, is destined for slaughter—until the selfless artistry of his friend, the spider Charlotte, rescues him. This is perhaps America's best-loved children's book: seamless in plot, memorable characters, and written with an ease that makes the reading as engrossing as it is effortless.

***NEW FRIENDS, TRUE FRIENDS, STUCK-LIKE-GLUE FRIENDS* by Virginia Kroll. Illustrated by Rose Rosely** (Eerdmans Publishing, 1994) Bright cartoon-like illustrations make this a fun-packed adventure. The story of all the things childhood friends do together sends a positive message about friendship.

# DIFFICULTIES WITH PEOPLE

## RESPONDING TO A BULLY

How do you respond when your grandchild has a personal or a social problem? As your correspondence develops, your partner may ask your advice about something that bothers him/her. For example, James wrote:

> I've got a problem with a kid on the bus. He's trying to pick a fight with me. He slaps me in the head, calls me names, and pushes me around. He's tough and mean.
>
> Got any suggestions? I've never been in a fight before.

Like most kids, James is scared. When such issues arise, respond as best you can. Use your own experience, or call an advisor, such as a school counselor. Then send back your best advice:

> Dear James,
>
> I'm sorry you have to deal with the mean guy on the bus. He sounds like the typical bully, trying to make himself look big by picking on someone.
>
> Fights hardly ever solve anything. Why don't you try some of these tactics? Move to another part of the bus, sit with friends. Try humor: "How come I'm your punching bag?" Get social support from other riders: "What's with this guy, always picking on me?" Maybe some social pressure will get him to back off. ***(over)***

**James' letter** **Page Two**

Seek advice from your school counselor. If you can't escape a fight because he pushes you into a corner, then fight like a whirlwind, like a wild alley cat. Maybe the fury of your fighting back will get him off your back in the future. But try everything else first.

Please let me know how it all works out. I'm sure that you will do okay because you are using your head. Remember: "The peacemakers will inherit the earth."

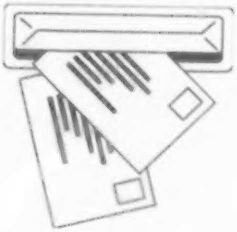
This letter sends these reassuring messages:

1. Your problem is real.
2. Try various ways to make peace.
3. Find help right near you.
4. You are the good guy.

In cases where the child may suffer physical or emotional damage, always encourage him/her to seek help on site. Parents, teachers, counselors, school administrators, the police, social workers, doctors, and are available to most children. Sometimes all they need is a reminder that help is close at hand.

If your grandchild raises a question that indicates a serious problem, please respond immediately. You can be sure that s/he wants an immediate answer. In fact, always try to respond quickly to such questions or problems. This promptness creates the sense of a conversation between you, and keeps the correspondence lively and important.

By the way, James tried some of the suggestions and reported that the bully left him alone after that. We lucked out.



# LETTERS ON DEALING WITH ADVERSITY

## Ages 3–5

Dear Penny,

Nicole wrote to me about some kids in her kindergarten class. She said that they always grab toys and books from her.

If that happens to you, tell those kids that grabbing things is not nice. Then ask your teacher for help. I'll bet she has some good ideas for you.

## Ages 6–8

Dear Mary,

When I was a Boy Scout, we had to promise to help someone each day. Even though I left the Boy Scouts many years ago, I still try to do one helpful act each day.

For example, Grandma likes tea, so I often make her a cup of tea and bring it to her. That may not sound like much, but it makes her feel special.

If you think about it, you probably do helpful acts for people every day, too. Why don't you make a list of the kind and helpful things that you do for other people, and show it to your mom and dad?

## Ages 9–12

Dear Bill,

I just read a newspaper story that upsets me. A twelve-year-old girl brought a gun to school and tried to shoot a boy who had called her a name. I know the boy should not have said hurtful things about her, but why did she respond by trying to kill him? The reason we have language is to talk—especially when we have disagreements.

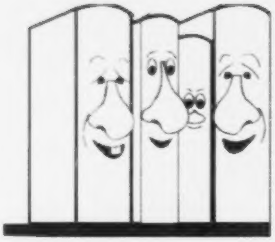
As a result of this story about the twelve-year-old girl shooting her classmate, I am determined to say one nice thing each day to someone.

## Ages 13–16

Dear Danny,

One summer I decided to learn to play tennis. I signed up for lessons at a local park, and by the end of the summer, I could play well enough to have fun with other beginners. I never played enough tennis to become really good, but I had fun learning, and met lots of nice people in the process.

Learning new things always brings rewards. One of my young friends is working on a hotline for teens in trouble or in pain. Are any of your friends working to help other people that way? If so, please do write to me about their work!



# BOOKS ABOUT KIDS' PROBLEMS

## For Ages 3–5

***ANGRY ARTHUR* by Hiawyn Oram** (Farrar Straus, 1997) When Arthur's mother won't let him stay up, he gets angry—angrier than he's ever been. His anger creates a thunderstorm, a hurricane, a universe-quake! But the storm finally calms, as does Arthur. His story helps kids deal with their frustrations.

## For Ages 6–8

***THE LIBRARY DRAGON* by Carmen Deedy** (Peachtree, 1997) Sunrise Elementary School has a BIG problem: the new librarian is a *real* dragon. Children learn from the characters how to deal with difficult people. The book won the 1997 Florida Reading Association Children's Book Award.

## For Ages 9–12

***BEETHOVEN IN PARADISE* by Barbara O'Connor** (Farrar Straus, 1997) Martin is musically talented and lives in a trailer park called Paradise. His father thinks music is for wimps, real boys play baseball. Martin learns how to stand up to his father and persist with his music.

## For Ages 13–16

***CHARLIE'S STORY* by Maeve Friel** (Peachtree Publishers, 1997) Charlotte "Charlie" Collins is struggling to deal with her mother's desertion, her father's silence, and the cruelty of classmates who call her "the abandoned baby." Charlotte learns her individuality is also her strength, and it can change how others treat her.

# Becoming a Citizen

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S CHANGING VALUES

The lives of American young people differ dramatically from those of our childhood. Today's teens grow up in a far more complex world than their parents did. They are taking longer to leave home, to finish college, to form their own households, to marry and have children.

According to the Horatio Alger Association's 1999 survey, "The State of our Nation's Youth," high school students name crime and violence as the greatest problem facing us. Indeed the percentage of teens citing these factors jumped from 30% in 1998 to 40% in 1999.

Their number two problem, cited in the same percentage as in 1998, is a decline in family, moral, and social values.

In 1999 racial tension and discrimination moved from sixth to fifth place in their ranking; and eight percent of students considered these areas the number one problem. More than nine percent of students chose domestic terrorism, chemical and biological warfare, or international terrorism as our most urgent problem.

These figures show a heartening trend. Namely, young people care increasingly about their social and political environment. Unlike those of "The Me Decade," the eighties, today's youth is aware of our global dilemmas and wants to help find remedies for them.

You can connect with this important trend by taking up such socio-political issues in your letters to grandchildren. Naturally, we all wonder what is in the minds of youngsters who resort to guns to solve their personal problems. Why not ask your penpals about their perceptions of this situation? Your letter exchange can then discuss a crucial generational matter.

In this way you will enlarge your junior penpals' social consciousness. Letting them know the significance of their involvement in the social world will tell them you support whatever way they choose to participate in the democratic process. If you or your friends volunteer for a local political party, tell penpals why that kind of work is both important and rewarding. Or tell them about civic projects you support. Your example may well spark a youngsters' curiosity about what is happening in their own city or town.

# RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP

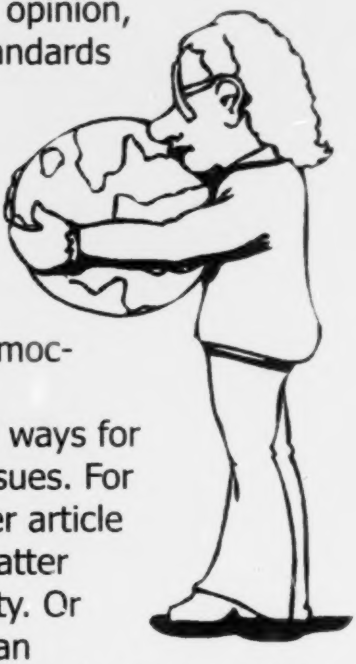
## WHAT DO ELECTIONS SIGNIFY?

VOTING BOOTH

Every political election reminds adults of our civic obligations. Some elections generate enough publicity to attract the attention of children. The media cover Presidential elections extensively, especially when major emotional issues like crime and welfare are on the ballot. Many kids now express concern about such environmental issues as clean air and water, which will directly affect the quality of their future lives. In the election of 2000, Democrats and Republicans held different positions on environmental controls. These opposing views brought out some excellent discussion topics for youngsters.

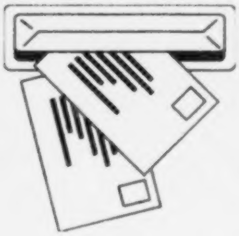
The election message for children is not political in the partisan sense. Elections simply offer regular opportunities to become better citizens. To vote responsibly, we need reliable information. To make informed choices, we must read extensively and listen critically to the candidates' messages.

Grandparents can brighten their grandkids' future by helping them learn how to evaluate information critically. Besides the comments in our letters, we can also prompt them to seek guidance and practice from their teachers. They can show



children how to separate fact from opinion, for example, or how to develop standards for judging a proposal's merits. Interacting with their teachers and peers in this way, students themselves will raise the classroom's level of critical thinking. Ultimately they will also become the thoughtful voters our democracy needs.

Your letters could recommend ways for kids to get interested in political issues. For instance, try enclosing a newspaper article or a short book about a specific matter that might spark the child's curiosity. Or your letter might suggest reading an article on reducing crime or protecting the environment. Then your penpal could write you his/her reactions to the article. Finally, discussing one of your own pet political causes shows your junior partner that you don't just preach activism; instead you practice the ideals of participatory democracy.



# LETTERS ON CITIZENSHIP

## Ages 3–5

Dear Ollie,

Thanks so much for that lovely postcard from your state capitol. I bet you and the family had fun touring the state house and meeting the people there.

I'm enclosing a picture of our town hall. Isn't it pretty? I've never visited my state capitol, but now you've given me the idea! I'm hoping to go soon with my wife and daughter.

## Ages 6–8

Dear Frank,

Congratulations! I think you'll make a wonderful class President. Isn't an election interesting?

I'd love to hear about what you plan to do in this new role. I can't remember voting for class officers before high school. Then it seemed like just a popularity contest. I don't think the President ever organized anything with the class, but I bet you will be doing just that. Hats off to the new leader!

## Ages 9–12

Dear Paula,

I enjoyed getting your thoughts on the recent election. I'm so glad you read the newspaper daily, as you must learn so much from it.

Tell me, please: why do you think many young people aren't at all interested in the news? I know that some kids think politics doesn't touch them; but isn't that an unrealistic idea? I think that what goes on in the world affects everyone. For instance, when crops fail or factories close, consumers must find substitutes for what they need.

Please tell me what current news stories interest you the most. Then we can correspond about them.

## Ages 13–16

Dear Mandy,

Did your class discuss the recent election? If so, I'd love to read about your classmates' reactions. Do they think voting is important, for instance? And what issues do they care about especially?

I remember my mother, a Russian immigrant, saying how thrilled she was to vote for the first time. Having gone through the process of becoming a citizen, she saw her first vote as the culmination of a very significant development in her life.

Voting means a lot to me too, as it gives me the chance to help improve our communal lives. Do you look forward to voting?

# VOLUNTEERING

## HELPING OURSELVES BY HELPING OTHERS

Citizenship also means recognizing and acting on a sense of community in our lives. Joining with others to improve our communal life has valuable benefits: group and individual bonding with kindred, civic-minded spirits, and an enhanced sense of self-worth.

In a world that focuses clearly on the individual, children may miss the rewarding opportunity of helping others. But through your letters you can remind them of ways they can make their neighborhood, their school, or their home happier places. All they need to do is show they care about others, especially those who need recognition.

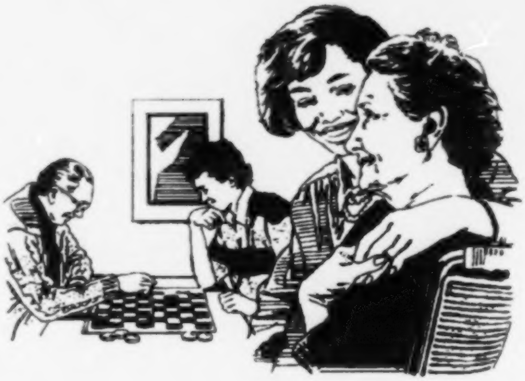
We all share the responsibility of making our communities safe, pleasant, and helpful. Children may be surprised at how their relationships thrive when they remember to praise, compliment, help, or show some other kindness to their families, classmates, and neighbors. The benefits are immediate: people like seeing such caring youngsters; they receive praise and favors in return; and their self-esteem rises.

Instead of preaching this message, try giving kids specific examples of volunteering. How about working for a political party or a specific candidate in a campaign? Stuffing envelopes, making phone calls, and distributing flyers is not fascinating work; but just working with others who share the same social goals is meaningful.

One of the best parts of such experience is meeting other young people. Idealistic students who volunteer regularly may inspire others to match their reliability. Furthermore, their energy, optimism, and easy laughter make the work fun. These adolescents show that the cliches about being self-centered are wrong. In fact, several recent studies have shown that kids of all ages have gotten the volunteering bug.

You might get your penpals interested in spending some of their leisure time in this way. So many organizations depend on volunteers that children can readily find a group whose mission matches their interests and abilities. For instance, if your penpal is artistic, you might suggest that he/she decorate the walls of a local homeless shelter. The residents there are among the neediest citizens, so they deeply appreciate any help.

Young people often do well with crafts, which is something they could probably teach to others. Being so involved with learning themselves, many youngsters have

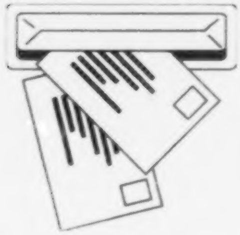


a knack for sharing their skills. Senior centers and nursing homes offer students the opportunity to interact with older generations, thereby gaining experience and knowledge that add humane values to their education.

Here's a list of helpful activities to suggest to your grandchild. Ask him/her to try one for two weeks, and then write to you about how it felt to help others.

- ★ **Take out the trash for parents or neighbors.**
- ★ **Bring in and sort the family's mail.**
- ★ **Walk a neighbor's dog.**
- ★ **Visit a nursing home with a group of friends or a parent.**
- ★ **Read to an elderly neighbor or a pre-schooler.**
- ★ **Write to your Congressperson about a community concern, such as potholes or a rundown playground.**
- ★ **Donate a book to the public library.**

Your own volunteering sets a personal example for penpals, so tell them about anything you do to help others. They may then feel motivated to do likewise. In this way we can become a nation of volunteers.



## LETTERS ABOUT COMPASSION

### Ages 3–5

Dear Lily,

Your Mom told me about the two of you working at the church fair a while ago. So I'm wondering what you did, and if it was fun.

Could you please draw a picture of the fair and the people who were there? If you send it to me I'll put it up on my bulletin board with all your other lovely drawings.

### Ages 6–8

Dear Winona,

Thanks so much for your interesting letter. I loved reading about your school's community project. People tend to think of the needy only around the winter holidays; so it's great that you're going to be helping them all year long.

Please keep me posted about where you will be working and the adventures you have there.

## Ages 9–12

Dear Danny,

You asked for a recent picture of me, so here I am with my friend Bertha. We've been pals for many years, and try to get together often. But she works most days for a teen hotline, counseling young people on their problems. Drugs, sex, conflict with parents, tough teachers, girl- and boyfriends: you name it, she's heard it all!

Do you know of a hotline in your town? It's a wonderful resource for people in trouble. What do your friends do when their problems seem overwhelming?

## Ages 13–16

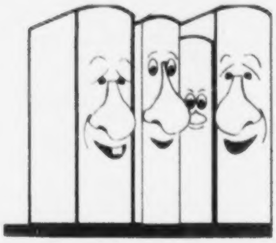
Dear Nicholas,

I think the happiest people are those who help others. A month ago, a fifteen-year-old boy from my church had his leg amputated because of bone cancer. Wouldn't that be tough to take?

Some of the youth group decided not to abandon Rubin, or allow him to start feeling sorry for himself. They visited him in the hospital, read to him, wrote to him, and made sure he had visitors every day. When Rubin came home, they continued to visit and help him with school work until he could return to school.

I saw these young people at church with Rubin, all laughing and talking. He was happy because he had friends to see him through this difficulty. They were happy because they knew they were helping Rubin.

I hope you have many opportunities to show people how nice you are.



# BOOKS ON CITIZENSHIP

## For Ages 3–5

***A FIRST PETER RABBIT BOOK* by Beatrix Potter.** (Dial Books, 1997) These classic stories introduce the youngest children to indispensable social habits. Potter's adorable creatures learn how to get what they want without hurting others, and to understand an often perplexing adult world.

## For Ages 6–8

***"NOT NOW!" SAID THE COW* by Joanne Oppenheim.** (Bantam Books, 1990) A crow finds a sack of corn, but can't convince the other animals to help him plant it. Of course they all want to enjoy the popcorn at the end, but the crow has other ideas. Teaches basic values of sharing, cooperation, and community.

## For Ages 9–12

***HARRIET TUBMAN. CONDUCTOR ON THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD* by Ann Petry**. (Harper Trophy, 1996) Born a slave, Tubman risked her life for freedom—not only her own, but that of others. Dubbed "Moses," she delivered hundreds from the desert of slavery. Petry recreates a life of inspiring bravery and unshakable moral strength.

***SHH! WE'RE WRITING THE CONSTITUTION* by Jean Fritz**. (Scholastic Books, 1987.) The author documents the Constitutional Convention with her remarkable ability to bring history to life. The book includes a copy of the Constitution.

***MAGGIE MARMELSTEIN FOR PRESIDENT* by Marjorie Sharmat**. (Harper Trophy, 1975) Maggie is running for sixth-grade president against her friend Thad Smith. Neither of them wins, but both learn a lot about what election means. Sharmat's warm sense of humor will surely charm both you and your penpals. And she even includes her own recipe for Victory Cake.

## For Ages 13–16

***SOUNDER* by William Armstrong**. (Harper Trophy, 1969) This classic Newbery Medal winner offers "a rarely sensitive, understated novel about a black sharecropper and his family in the 19th-century... The characters' namelessness lends them universality as oppressed people, while authentic, detailed descriptions assure their individuality." (*SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL*)

***ELEANOR ROOSEVELT. A LIFE OF DISCOVERY* by Russell Freedman**. (Houghton Mifflin, 1997) Freedman traces the development of the First Lady from a shy, dominated girl into a world champion of human rights. This Newbery Honor book conveys much of Mrs. Roosevelt's inner life, with which both children and adults may identify.

# Quick Ideas for Quick Letters

## TOPIC IDEAS

Months, weeks and days that celebrate events and people of national significance offer letter topics of immediate interest. Did you know that National Grandparents' Day is September 7? In a letter to your grandchild at that time you might write about what a special relationship you have together.

For timely ideas on national months, *CHASE'S CALENDAR OF ANNUAL EVENTS* (Appletree Press) is the perfect resource. The 2001 Calendar is the 44th edition. Your public library probably has *CHASE'S*.

On the next page, there is a sample of some of the less well-known events in a year:

**Labor History Month: May**
**Women's History Month: March**
**Education and Sharing Day: April 11**
**Older Americans' Month: May**
**Human Rights Week: December 10-17**
**Bill of Rights Day: December 15**
**Hispanic Heritage Month: September**
**United Nations Day: October 24**
**Native Americans' Month: November**
**Jewish Heritage Week: April 21-28**
**National Volunteer Week: April 21-27**

Other features are: Spotlight on People (birth and death anniversaries), Religion, Education, The Past, Facts about States, National Education Goals—even the Naming of Hurricanes!

## WRITING LETTERS TO OTHER CHILDREN

A central part of a child's life is friendship. The **SENIOR PARTNERS NETWORK** helps seniors be just the encouraging friend a child may need, simply by giving children the gift of letter-writing. Seniors in the Network do for other kids what grandparents can do for their grandkids. A Senior Partner ensures that a Junior Partner has a special older penpal—one who can share discoveries, offer advice on problems, and generally enjoy friendship through the mail. Such a partner can make the difference between failure and success in young lives.

Senior Partners also derive the same benefits from this relationship that you will from writing to your own grandchildren. In 1990 a study by The Center on Rural Elderly concluded that seniors and youths benefit significantly by programs that sponsor activities between the two groups.

**Some benefits for seniors are:**

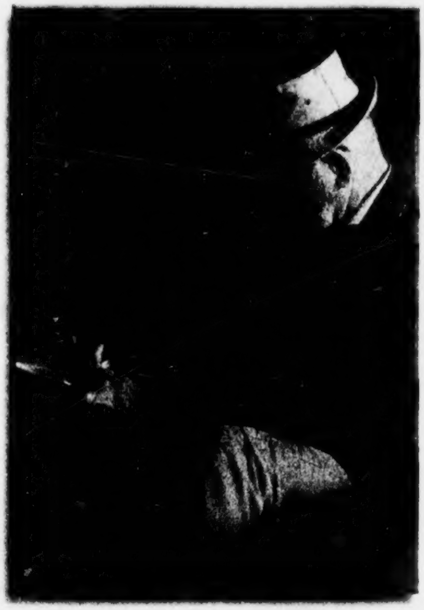
- ★ **higher self esteem**
- ★ **new friends and social contacts**
- ★ **restored confidence**
- ★ **shared skills and talents**
- ★ **a chance to exchange affection**

**Some benefits for the youth are:**

- ★ **broader view of life and aging**
- ★ **sense of responsibility**
- ★ **acceptance of differences**
- ★ **meaningful relationships with someone special**
- ★ **interaction with positive adult role models**

(Source: Intergenerational Relations, Center on Rural Elderly, May 1990.)

Service clubs and groups of retirees can help young people through the **SENIOR PARTNERS NETWORK**. In just a few minutes a month, you could build a lasting friendship and increase a child's enthusiasm for learning. If you would like us to assign you a penpal, just call or write, and we will happily give you as many Junior Partners as you have time and energy to correspond with. Just call the Family Literacy Center at (800) 759-4723, and ask to sign up for the **SENIOR PARTNERS NETWORK**.



## BOOK SHARING

Barbara Putrich and her teenage daughter have come closer together by doing one simple thing: they read the same book and talk about it. Jerry Nugent and his son did the same thing. "I have seen wonderful changes," says Nugent, "in our family and in the others who are sharing books with their children." A recent study shows that adults can discuss all kinds of events with kids without the preachy tone so often associated with such conversations. The participants focused on a book they were reading, nothing more. Now why would that make such a difference?

The action in a book stands outside the adult-child relationship. Parent or grandparent and child can thus talk about fun things or bothersome events without a threat to their personal relationship. If each person gives the other the courtesy and freedom to react to the story events, they will express their feelings, ideas, and convictions without any direct implications about their own relationship. For example, a young child can sympathize with the fears of a fictional child without fearing ridicule for being a baby—as might happen to the reader in his/her own family.

An adult can predict ugly consequences for a story character who skips school. "Let's see if I am right." Yet that same prediction about a real-life person or her friends would probably offend the child. With a story character, the adult can express values as an observer. He/she makes no prediction or judgment about the daughter. Whatever the grandparent says reflects the actions of a story character. The granddaughter absorbs the point, however, without feeling attacked.

Even more valuably, book conversations between child and adult reveal that each have thoughts and feelings, joys and sorrows that the other may not perceive otherwise. They begin to develop a respect for each other, even if they disagree.

Since time slips easily through our fingers, many people claim they don't have time to read and discuss books with children. Probably they believe that book-sharing requires lengthy periods each day or each week. Quite the contrary. I recommend short books and short messages about them; make your book exchanges brief and fun.

As a letter writer, you can also use the book-sharing activity as a way of holding valuable written conversations. Why not ask your grandchild about reading a book together, and then sharing your thoughts about it as you progress? You may want to send him/her an inexpensive book as a way of starting your book conversations. If you do, select something that is age-appropriate and fits the child's interests.

Book sharing often produces great benefits for the adult and the child who try it. Mutual communication is a starter. Then there is the high probability that you will find books you both enjoy. Who knows? You may rediscover the wonderful world of children's books.

## TAKING INVENTORY

Here is a list of questions about children's interests that you can copy and send to your grandchildren. Use it to help you choose a book for you and your penpal to read and discuss.

### Inventory of Interests

1. What do you like to do most?

2. What is your favorite thing to do with your family?

3. What are your favorite animals?

4. What things do you like to collect?

5. Which books are your current favorites?

   Magazines or newspapers?

   Comic books or comic strips?

6. What kinds of books do you like most?

fairy tales
adventures
jokes/riddles
detective stories

picture books
science fiction
books about growing up
autobiography and biography

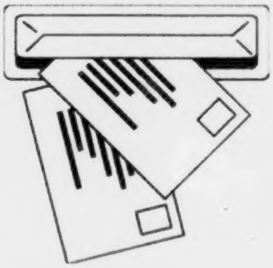
romances
poetry
sports novels
how-to books

7. Who is your favorite character to read about?

8. What do you like about that character?

9. Which TV shows or movies do you enjoy watching?

10. What are those shows about?



# SHARING BOOKS THROUGH LETTERS

In letters to your grandchild, why not mention something that you have recently read, expressing your feelings about the ideas, events, or characters in that book or article? Then encourage your penpal to send back his or her feelings about a book. In this way you can also promote the reading of books as a source of ideas and a way of communicating among the family. The people who interest both you and your grandchild are probably compelling personalities partly because of the reading they do. Why not say so in your letters?

## Ages 3–5

Dear Natasha,

I just saw an ABC book called THE ANIMAL ALPHABET BOOK. Each letter looked like some animal. "A" was an alligator, "B" was a butterfly, "C" was a cat. It made me laugh to see all the animals twisted into the shapes of all those letters.

Have you read any books lately? Will you tell me about the book, or send pictures?

## Ages 6–8

Dear Drew,

Do you tell others about the books you read? I get all kinds of good ideas from books. Did you know that some birds live in big cactuses in the desert? I have wondered how I would live if I got lost in the desert.

Please tell me about a book you are reading. I'm sure you are learning some interesting things.

## Ages 9–12

Dear Daniel,

When I was your age, there were no computers. Most information was available only in a book. I just read THE CLIENT, by John Grisham, the story of a boy who saw a crooked lawyer commit suicide. Before he died, he told the boy where the body of a well-known politician was buried and who murdered him. Both the mob and the police chase the boy to try to get the information from him. A woman lawyer uses all kinds of legal tricks to protect the boy, her "client."

I learned some new twists to an individual's legal rights through this book. Have you read anything interesting lately?

## Ages 13–16

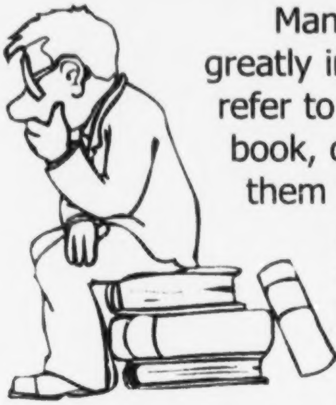
Dear Daryl,

I was just reading a story that made me think of you. In it two brothers don't get along well. One is handsome and athletic; the other lacks strength and looks like any ordinary guy. You can see why there might be tension between these two brothers.

As I read this story, "Chinese Handcuffs," I was hoping you and your brother weren't having the same kinds of problems. That's one of the advantages I find in reading books: they help me think about my life and the people around me. I hope I make better decisions as a result of thinking about the characters in a book.

Have you read anything lately that stirred you up?

# SELECTING A BOOK FOR YOUR GRANDCHILD



Many people can name a book that has greatly influenced their lives. They often refer to the Bible or some other religious book, or to a novel that has convinced them to pursue an adventure that they previously lacked the courage to undertake. Reading a book may hold a personal meaning; but the major reason parents and grandparents encourage reading lies in its power to develop a successful person.

Through reading we gain joy, knowledge, and career success. Being fluent readers and knowing how to find and use information sets us apart from those who have not achieved those skills. That advantage is becoming more evident every day. Readers have a stronger sense of personal worth than non-readers. They are also more likely to enjoy the good things in life than those who can't or won't read. And the habit of reading gives one a permanent inner resource. For those reasons alone, we should do whatever we can to promote reading among our children.

Follow the brief guidelines on the next page in selecting books for your grandchildren.

1 **Surround them with Books:** Send them books from your own shelves, from the bookstore, from grandma's attic. Keep the books coming.

2 **Converse About Books:** Encourage parents or older peers to read aloud to children, no matter their age. Then talk about the story —but make it a conversation, not a test. Write to your grandchild about the books you read, and ask what s/he finds interesting about them.

3 **Select Appealing Books:** Children's interests change naturally as they grow and develop curiosity: from picture books for young children to neighborhood adventures in the early grades, to personal friendships in the preteen years.

4 **Give short, easy books:** Don't overwhelm a child with difficult reading. Until you are sure the child wants more challenging material, give books that are quick, fun, and easy to read. That doesn't mean you shouldn't give reference books as gifts, but don't give difficult books when you want the child to read for pleasure.

5 **Expand Horizons:** Use book buying as an opportunity to expand your grandchild's views. Remember, books offer our quickest, most powerful vehicle for new experience. Information, humor, fantasy, adventure, problem-solving: all can pop out of a book.

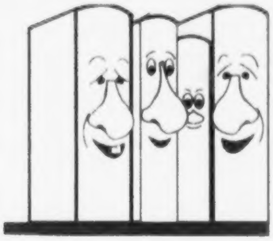
6 **Ask your grandchild:** Finally, but most importantly, ask for suggestions. What does s/he want and need?

## Book Sharing Opens Communication

Thousands of grandparents across the country have discovered a great way to open communication with their grandchildren by reading and sharing books. You can do the same with your grandchild. Have him/her select a book you both can read. As you read, write to each other about the book. Do you both like it? How do you feel about the characters? What do you think will happen next? Does the book have any special meaning for you? Place as much value on the child's feelings and opinions as you do on your own.

Have you ever noticed how much people have to tell each other when they discover they have read and liked the same book or seen the same film? Their conversation seems energized by the common experience of a story they have shared. You and your young penpal might enjoy sharing your ideas about one of the following books, which all deal with writing. Grandparents can send a copy of the book to their grandkids, or ask them if they know how to find the book in the public library. What a great way to begin your new letter connection! Of course you can find many more books on all topics suitable for kids at the library and on the World Wide Web.

If you and your grandchild have enjoyed sharing a book, please write or call, and we will include it in our Senior Partners newsletter.



# BOOKS ABOUT WRITING LETTERS

## For Ages 3–5

***DEAR BEAR* by Joanna Harrison** (Lerner Books, 1994) Katie is afraid of the bear that lives under the stairs in her house. But then they exchange letters and she finally gets to meet him.

***ARTHUR'S PEN PAL* by Lillian Hoban** (Harper Collins, 1982) (Also Harper Audio, 1990) When Arthur receives a photograph from his penpal Sandy, he changes his ideas about big brothers and little sisters.

## For Ages 6–8

***EVERY MONDAY IN THE MAILBOX* by Louisa Fox** (Eerdmans Publishing, 1995) Melinda looks forward to the letters she receives from her favorite neighbor, who has moved into a nursing home. When the elderly woman dies, it takes time for Melinda to find a way to stop missing her.

***CLEVER LETTERS* by Laura Allen** (Pleasant Co., 1997) Have fun with the way you write! This entertaining guide shows how to create pretzel letters, smoosh-cards, invisible messages and more.

## For Ages 9–12

***DEAR MR. HENSHAW* by Beverly Cleary** (William Morrow, 1997) In letters to his favorite author, ten-year-old Leigh reveals problems in coping with his parents' divorce, being the new boy in school, and generally finding his own place in the world.

## For Ages 13–16

***BEETHOVEN LIVES UPSTAIRS* By Barbara Nichol** (Orchard Books, 1994) Letters that Christoph and his uncle exchange show how Christoph's feelings for Mr. Beethoven, the eccentric boarder in his home, change from anger and embarrassment to compassion and admiration.

# OTHER RESOURCES

## BOOKS FOR PARENTS & GRANDPARENTS

With Love,
Grandma
Letters to Grandchildren
by
Carl B. Smith

### With Love, Grandma

***by Carl B. Smith** (with Naomi Ritter)*

This is the first collection of sample letters and books to share made possible by the **SENIOR PARTNERS NETWORK**. It is full of whimsical illustrations and drawings by children. The book will enlighten you about what to write to your grandkids. Subjects include holidays, family, the seasons, and school, as well as developmental charts, a list of resources, and essays by Dr. Fitzhugh Dodson and Bob Keeshan (aka Captain Kangaroo).

### Grandma & Grandpa, May I Come Over?

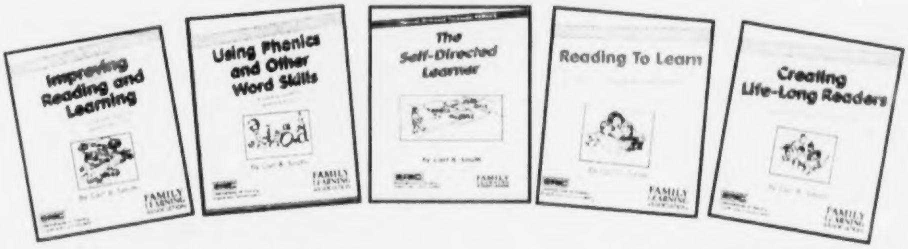
***by Marian Brovero***

Grandma
&
Grandpa
May I Come Over?
Marian Brovero

When they visit, grandchildren want to DO things. This book presents 52 different activities for each week of the year that are easy and inexpensive. They range from planting a seed, to visiting a horse, to dusting the bookshelves! The large-print format and original artwork make this a perfect gift. Ms. Brovero used her own grandchildren to test, refine, and "kid-certify" that all these activities are both educational and enjoyable.

**The Family Learning Association** has numerous books and services to help families, including monthly topical bulletins. **Call 1-800-759-4723 for free information and catalogs.** Or see our website:
**www.kidscanlearn.com**

## HELPING CHILDREN TO LEARN SERIES



*Improving Reading and Learning* *Phonics and Other Word Skills*
*Reading to Learn* *Creating Life-Long Readers*
*The Self-Directed Learner*

## Language Arts Theme Units

*Our Environment* *Our Physical World* *Animals Around Us*
*Intriguing Animals* *People Around Us* *How People Live*

## Language Arts Around the World

*Europe* *Central and South America* *Asia and Australia*
*Where and How People Live* *Ecology and the Environment*

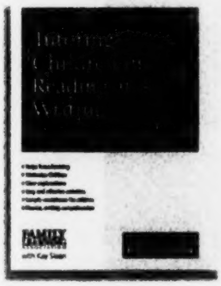
**1-800-759-4723** **www.kidscanlearn.com**

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## Phonics Plus, Books A, B, and C

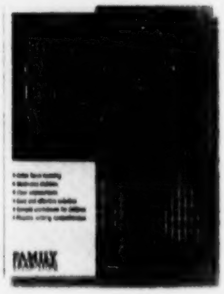
***developed by The Family Learning Association***

These three books help children learn to discriminate sound-symbol correspondences by listening, saying, seeing, and writing letters of the alphabet with illustrated writing and fill in the blank activities. Book A is appropriate for kindergartners and first-graders. Book B is for 1st–2nd grade, and Book C is for 2nd–3rd grade.



## Tutoring Children in Reading and Writing

**Book 1: Kindergarten**
**Book 2: Grades 1-2**



These guidebooks use a hands-on approach to helping children improve essential skills. Using easy and effective activities, they focus on the building blocks of reading and writing with sample worksheets that focus on letter recognition, spelling, phonics, and comprehension.

**1-800-759-4723** **www.kidscanlearn.com**

**Every grandparent wants to be remembered fondly. There is no better way than to send short letters.**

**shows you:**

- **how to start.**
- **what to write about.**
- **how to make it fun and easy.**
- **how to get replies.**
- **how to write memorable letters.**

**This book provides sample letters on numerous topics for all ages. Whether you want ideas to stimulate your grandchildren, or you need a quick letter to copy, you'll find it in**

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ASSOCIATION
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Bloomington, IN 47401

Also see **With Love, Grandma** for another series of letters to grandchildren.

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**About the Author**

*Carl B. Smith is the Director of The Family Learning Association and creator of the Senior Partner Network, a group dedicated to providing at-risk kids with cross-generational penpals.*

1-800-749-4723

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